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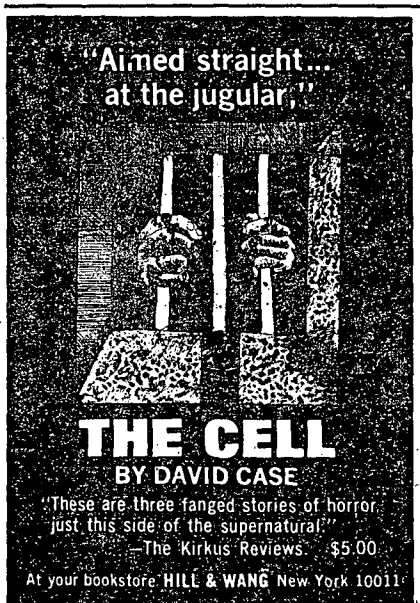
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a *NEW* Double-C spy story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The 13th (lucky number!) in the series about Rand, the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications... Was the shopping list a code used by a spy in the National Security Agency, a spy who could reveal the secrets of our latest bomb-detecting system? And were there contemporary parallels with Benedict Arnold, Major Andre, and the shopping list Mrs. Arnold included in a letter that passed between the conspirators in the most famous spy-and-treason case of the American Revolution?

Once again, Rand to the rescue...

THE SPY AND THE SHOPPING LIST CODE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE MISSION WHICH HAD brought Rand to America was ended, if not to his complete satisfaction, and he had a reservation on a flight back to London. It was only as a matter of simple courtesy that he drove his rented car out to the sprawling, closely guarded confines of the National Security Agency in Maryland to bid farewell to its deputy director.

But the day was sunny and pleasant, and since he'd already overstayed his visit by two weeks, Rand did not feel that a few more hours would make any difference. Besides, he had to admit that every visit to NSA fascinated him. He imagined what he could do back in London with such a setup, with 14,000 people trained in various phases of the fine art of cryptology, with computers and other electronic equipment that necessitated more electric wiring than any other building on earth.

The deputy director's office was in the nine-story Operations Building Annex, a boxy, modernistic structure opened late in 1965. He was expecting Rand and greeted him cordially, extending a slim

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bony hand with a grip like steel. "Rand! Good of you to stop by before your flight. We're going to hate to see you go."

Rand smiled and settled into a leather armchair, aware that the air conditioning was on, even though it was still early spring. "I'll miss it myself, frankly. You have a marvelous setup here. Concealed Communications could do with something a tenth as good."

"You need organization," the deputy director told him. "You have too many separate agencies working on the same things. We have it a bit, too, with the CIA, but we just stay in the background and let them have the glory—and the headaches."

The National Security Agency was larger than CIA in almost every respect, a fact that few Americans realized. Within the confines of his private office the deputy director was not above bragging about the fact.

"I wish I could stay longer and work on something with you," Rand said.

The deputy director's eyes narrowed. "I wish you could, too. We have an internal matter that's given me a few sleepless nights this week. An outside man might be able to give us an unbiased viewpoint."

"Sounds interesting."

"Look, Rand, why don't you stay? Just for another few days. Frankly, we could use you on this." The casual conversation had taken on a different, more official tone.

"I'm two weeks late now," Rand pleaded. "The work will be piled on my desk."

"Could I have your permission to get in touch with your superiors and make a formal request?"

Rand sighed and resigned himself to it. He knew there was nothing back in London so pressing that a request for aid from NSA would be turned down. "At least tell me what the problem is. It might be something completely out of my line."

"I don't need to impress on you the importance for secrecy."

"Of course not."

"It concerns one of our younger men, a fellow named Stephen Seth. We've been particularly sensitive to our employees' personal lives since a couple of homosexuals in important positions defected to Russia a few years back. I don't have to tell your Department about that sort of thing. It's happened to you, also."

"It has," Rand agreed. "Is Seth one of those?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. He's been married about three years, no children, but apparently he and his wife got along fine."

"Why apparently?"

"Well, last Saturday night he beat her up. Quite badly. She's in the hospital, and he's out on bail for assault."

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Rand smiled and reached for his cigarettes. "My understanding of America is that men often beat their wives on Saturday nights. Why is this case so unusual?"

"Believe me, it is unusual—and you can cut out the sarcasm. We've had to suspend Seth from his job, for personal conduct detrimental to the Agency. The thing is, neither one of them will talk, or give any motive for the fight. He just says he had a few beers too many."

"That would seem to be motive enough," Rand remarked. "I gather Seth's job here is especially sensitive, or you wouldn't be so concerned."

"It's sensitive," the deputy director said. "So sensitive that I can't even tell you all the details. Until a few months ago he was in our message analysis section, screening intercepts. But lately he's been working on something far more critical. I can tell you this much—for some years we've had a system of instant bomb reporting in this country. Sort of a Late Warning System, to go with the Early Warning System, I suppose. It was developed by the telegraph company and originally used small football-shaped devices which were placed in trees and on telegraph poles, mainly in rural areas. The idea was that when a bomb hit, or an explosion of any sort occurred in these areas, the electrical power was cut off to these devices, and they immediately flashed an alarm signal to the War Room of SAC, the Strategic Air Command in Omaha. The system worked fine in theory, but in practice it was something else again. During the great northeast power failure of November 1965, hundreds of these devices were triggered—with the result that SAC had planes in the air, under the impression that the United States was under attack."

"Sounds fantastic."

"Believe me, it happened, though the press has never gotten the full story of it. In any event, we now have a new, highly classified system to do more or less the same job. Since it relies on a type of coded communications signal, our agency is involved in some aspects of it. And Stephen Seth knows the whole story, complete with details."

"Would it really be that valuable to an enemy nation?"

"Certainly, for two reasons. They could build one of their own, or they could disrupt ours."

"But all the man did was beat his wife! You must have something more concrete to rouse your suspicions."

"I can't wait for concrete evidence with someone like Seth. His position is too critical. He travels around the country to these installations. He knows where everything is." The deputy director pulled open a drawer and

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extracted a manila folder. "But we do have this. It was found in Mrs. Seth's purse when she was taken to the hospital."

Rand studied the handwritten list:

7 Links
6 Hams
6 Jacks
Deliver Monday

"It's a shopping list of some sort," Rand said.

"A shopping list in Stephen Seth's handwriting. Do husbands usually write out shopping lists for their wives?"

"I suppose it could happen," Rand answered a bit uncertainly. "But then, the thing could be a code of some sort."

The deputy director leaned forward in his chair. "Seth has an odd sort of hobby. Codes and secret communications used during the American Revolution. He studies them, collects them."

"Not too peculiar for someone in his line of work," Rand remarked. "I've been known to dip into the history of secret writing myself on occasion."

"Are you familiar with Benedict Arnold, Mr. Rand?"

"A great British hero, wasn't he?" Rand answered with a grin.

"And his wife, Peggy Arnold?" The deputy director reached for a fresh cigar.

"Behind every great man there is a great woman."

"Historians have long believed that Peggy Arnold used a form of shopping-list code to transmit her husband's messages to Major Andre."

"I see," Rand said slowly. "You do know how to rouse my interest." He looked again at the shopping list in Stephen Seth's handwriting. "I just might have a talk with this fellow, if you really want me to."

The house was on a shady street in a middle-class suburb of Baltimore. It was a street with many children, and perhaps the very lack of them in front of the low brick ranchhouse of the Stephen Seths made that house stand out from the rest. Rand had phoned first, and Seth was watching for him, hurrying to usher him in before any of the neighbors could notice. Rand supposed that Seth felt a certain amount of chagrin over the events of the past week.

"You're Mr. Rand? The gentleman from London?"

"That's correct," Rand admitted. He was a bit surprised at Seth's hairy, unkempt appearance. Somehow he'd expected a clean-cut young man of the usual government sort. But, again, perhaps the week's events had taken their toll.

Stephen Seth paced nervously, occasionally hugging himself with his hairy arms. He was under thirty, and almost handsome, but the growth of beard now met his sideburns, merging with them,

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blurring the line of his chin and focusing attention on his wandering, bloodshot eyes. "Want a beer or something?"

"No, thanks."

"You called about—what? A book you're doing?"

Rand nodded. "On codes and ciphers used during the American Revolution. At NSA they told me you knew a great deal about the subject."

"A hobby, really," Seth told him, hugging himself as he paced. "You'll have to excuse me, but my wife is in the hospital—"

"I'm sorry. Perhaps another time would be better."

"No, no. I can probably tell you what you want to know."

Rand cleared his throat. "I was especially interested in Benedict Arnold and his wife."

"Quite well-known and somewhat routine," Seth said. "Why don't you do something on Horatio Gates? He was the real mystery man of the Revolution."

"Oh?"

Seth was warming to his subject. He settled into a modified crouch on the floor. "Sure. He was the general in command of the American forces at Saratoga. But there's a good deal of evidence that he might have attempted a deal with the British General Phillips to accept some sort of bribe for freeing British prisoners of war. That deal never materialized, but later Gates suffered quite a disgraceful defeat at Camden in South Carolina. He apparently vanished, or fled to safety, at the very height of that battle, leaving his troops to take care of themselves."

"You know a great deal about the war," Rand remarked.

"I told you it was a hobby with me."

"I'm especially interested in the various codes used by Arnold. Do you know anything about them?"

"Quite a lot. The first code that Arnold used was a fairly standard book code based on Volume One of Blackstone's *Commentaries* in its fifth Oxford edition. It was a three-number code, using the first number for the page, the second for the line, and the third for the word. But words not in the book had to be spelled out, letter by letter, and they soon switched to a code based on the *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. One bit of sophistication was the adding of 7 to each of the numbers, to encipher them. Many codes of the period were cased on books, though there were also some common substitution ciphers."

"I read somewhere that Peggy Arnold, Benedict's wife, used some sort of shopping-list code."

Stephen Seth shook his head. "A shopping list of hers was included in a letter that passed between the conspirators, but it was

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never proven to be in code. Actually, Peggy Arnold preferred to send her messages in invisible ink, interlined on a harmless letter of some sort."

"But do you have a copy of this shopping list?" Rand asked. "I'm most interested in it."

Seth's eyes narrowed, but after a moment he rose and walked to the bookcase at one end of the room. "I believe it's quoted in Carl Van Doren's *Secret History of the American Revolution* ... Ah, yes, here it is: *18 yards wide or 22 yards narrow pale pink mantua, 1 piece broad pale pink ribbon, 6 yards satinet for shoes, 1 piece diaper for napkins, 1 pair neat spurs, and 1 piece clouting diaper*. You'll note they're all yard-goods and material, except for the spurs."

"What about the clouting diaper? Did Peggy Arnold have a baby?"

"No, and that's one of the things that made historians suspect a code of some sort. But Van Doren pretty much discounts it in his book."

"Well," Rand said, "you've been a great help. I don't want to keep you any longer, with your wife in the hospital, but I may have to call on you again."

"Any time," Seth said, walking him to the door. "I hope I told you what you wanted to know."

Rand smiled and went down the walk to his car. Stephen Seth had told him a great deal about the American Revolution, but very little about himself.

The hospital lobby was cluttered with running children and somber adults, looking like hospital lobbies everywhere. Perhaps in England there was not quite so much waiting space, not quite so much plushness, but the faces of the people were always the same. Serious, even when they were laughing.

Harriet Seth's room was the last one on the left, a double or semi-private, but with the other bed unoccupied. Mrs. Seth was sitting up in bed with the latest issue of a woman's magazine propped against her knees, and except for her face she didn't look sick at all. Both eyes had been blackened, and were still swollen and discolored. There was also a bandage around her temples, hiding all but the fiery top of her red hair. He thought she was a good-looking girl, but under the circumstances he couldn't be sure.

"Mrs. Seth? I'm Rand. From your husband's office. They asked me to stop by." Folksy, just as if he worked in an insurance office or a bank.

"Someone was here already," she said, tossing aside the magazine. "They even brought those flowers."

He pulled up the chair next to the bed, ignoring what she'd said, "I think they just wanted me to

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ask a few more questions—about the hospitalization, you know. For the records."

"Oh." She shifted in the bed, apparently satisfied.

"How are you feeling today?"

"Better. The swelling's gone down."

He motioned toward the bandage. "Your head?"

"A slight concussion. That's why I'm still here. But I can go home tomorrow."

"Your husband caused these injuries?"

"I'm not pressing charges," she answered firmly.

He walked to the window, noting with some curiosity a round spot on the sill where a vase of flowers might have rested until recently. Perhaps the flowers had died and been thrown away. "I saw him this morning. He seemed very upset."

"He should be!" she snorted.

He reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. "I want to show you something and ask what you know about it."

At that moment, staring at the worn leather wallet in his hand, a look of sheer terror crossed her face. She seemed on the verge of tears. "I don't know anything," she mumbled. "Honest!"

He opened the wallet and extracted the handwritten shopping list. Oddly enough, she relaxed a bit at the sight of it. "I wanted to ask you about this shopping list. I believe it's in your husband's handwriting?"

"He wrote it out for me."

"I see. What are *links*? And *jacks*?"

"Link sausage and jackfish—pike." She frowned at him. "Say, are you some sort of detective?"

"Not really," Rand said, passing it off. "Tell me, Mrs. Seth, had you been drinking Saturday night, before the fight?"

"I had a few, yes. But there was no fight."

"You fell down?"

"It's a personal matter, between the two of us."

"I see." There was no more to be learned here. "Thank you, Mrs. Seth. I wish you a speedy recovery."

"They're letting me out tomorrow," she repeated. "If you see him again, you might tell him."

"I'll do that. If I see him."

Rand had the distinct feeling that the day had been an utter waste. Operating in a strange country he seemed only to be going through the motions. But there was one more thing to be tried before he reported failure to the deputy director. Rand drove back to Stephen Seth's house and parked about a block away, waiting.

After nearly two hours Rand had just about decided that the car wouldn't move out of Seth's driveway. And yet, the fact that

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it was out of the garage at all hinted at some journey in the offing. He thought he would give it another half hour.

Just before 4:30 Stephen Seth appeared. He still seemed nervous as he got into his car and drove toward Baltimore. For a time Rand wondered if he could keep the man in sight among the buildings and shops of a strange city, but it proved to be no problem. Seth drove straight downtown and parked at Charles Center. He headed for one of the nearby department stores, with Rand not far behind.

There seemed to be no hesitation as he entered the store, passed through the book department without a glance either way, and paused finally in the stationery section. On one counter was a display of new electric typewriters, and Seth went straight to the demonstration machine that had a sheet of paper in its carriage. He typed a few words, as if testing the machine's performance, and then walked casually away.

Rand watched until he was certain that Seth was headed back to his car, then went up to the typewriter himself. Seth had written, quite neatly:

8 Links
8 Hams
3 Jacks
Deliver Saturday

The store was closing in a half hour, and Rand was certain that someone would come to read the message in the typewriter. But no one did. No one even approached the machine except a small child being towed by its mother, and he was yanked away before he could do more than touch the keys above his head. Neither child nor mother bothered to look at the sheet of paper with its message.

Finally, at closing time, Rand left with the other customers. He drove over to the deputy director's home that evening, and they sat by the fireplace while he ran over the day's events and what little he'd learned.

"The evenings are cool," the deputy director said when he'd finished, avoiding comment on Stephen Seth.

"Look," Rand reminded him, "I didn't ask for this assignment. I could have caught the plane to London this morning. Perhaps your own men should be handling this after all."

"No, no, Rand. Forgive me." He shifted his stare from the fireplace to Rand's troubled face. "You've done a fine job, better than any of Stephen Seth's coworkers could have done. It's just that—well, I suppose I was hoping that somehow it wasn't true. A spy within the organization is always something to be regretted, even when it's only one man out of 14,000."

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Rand nodded, understanding what the deputy director had left unspoken. If there was one, there could be two. Or twenty. Or two hundred. "Is he in a position to deliver the critical information on the bomb-reporting network?"

"He is. And may already have done so. What do you make of those shopping lists?"

"A code of some sort. Almost impossible to break without the code book."

"You know, Rand, it's like Benedict Arnold all over again, isn't it?"

"That's surely where he got the idea for the shopping lists, but I don't know about the rest of it."

The deputy director settled back in his chair. "Peggy Arnold was in it, too, just as Harriet Seth appears to be. If you know your history, you'll remember they were trying to deliver West Point to the British, and West Point had a defense system—a massive chain hung across the Hudson River. Perhaps that chain is a little like our bomb-reporting network."

Rand smiled slightly. "Then to carry the analogy a step further, we should be searching for a Major Andre."

"Quite correct. Any idea where we might find him?"

"Not yet, but I think I'll be back in that department store tomorrow morning, early. Someone's sure to come by and read Stephen Seth's latest shopping list."

But the morning was to bring Rand only disappointment. The typewriter was still in its position on the counter, but now a smooth, blank sheet of paper rested in the carriage, ready to accept a new day's graffiti.

Rand stared at it, dumfounded, then asked the blonde clerk, "Do you change the paper every morning?"

"What? What paper?"

"In the typewriter."

"Oh. Sure, every morning. Sometimes two or three times a day, if lots of people try it—or if kids write something dirty. Say, are you English?"

"I—yes, I am."

"Thought so. We get a lot of foreigners here. I can spot them every time. You interested in this typewriter?"

"No," Rand said, moving away. "Not now."

He stopped at a little coffee shop down the street and tried to sort it out in his mind. Stephen Seth had certainly left that message for someone to read, and yet no one had come by last night. The paper in the demonstration typewriter was routinely changed each morning—a fact which Seth must have known. Then who had read it? The blonde girl at the counter? No—the very obviousness of such a contact would have negated so simple a procedure.

No, it had to be someone else in the store—an employee who

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passed through the stationery department on the way to the parking lot each night. That was the only logical explanation.

Rand smoked another American cigarette and pondered the dregs in his coffee cup. He remembered the vague references in the history books to a possible love affair between Peggy Arnold and Major John Andre. Was it possible that the parallels about which the deputy director had spoken might extend even to this? It was more than possible—it was probable. Because what else but a love triangle would have caused Seth to jeopardize his whole operation by beating up his wife like that?

Five minutes later Rand was on the phone to the deputy director, saying, "I have an idea about our Major Andre."

"Oh?"

"I'm sure you've kept track of Harriet Seth's visitors at the hospital."

"There's no record kept of visitors' names."

"You disappoint me. Look, here's what I'm after—someone who works at the Charles Center department store and who made contact with Harriet Seth in the hospital—either phoned or visited her or sent her flowers or a card. Can you find out for me?"

"Perhaps. I'll check."

Rand hung up and went back to his car. If he was right about the love affair, then certainly the man would have tried to reach her in the hospital after he heard the news. It just might start a chain—all he needed was a single link.

It was mid-afternoon before the deputy director got back to him, but this time the news was more promising. "She had some flowers from a fellow named Carter—Greg Carter. The nurse thought it was strange, because Mrs. Seth had her take them out of the room before her husband visited her."

"And?"

"The Baltimore city directory lists a Gregory Carter as a men's wear buyer at the department store."

"That's him, then," Rand said with certainty. "Our Major Andre."

"How can you be sure, Rand?"

"If the beating and her relationship with Carter had nothing to do with the rest of it, then why are Harriet and her husband so secretive about it? It would be to their advantage to behave as openly as possible."

"But he goes on leaving messages for Carter."

"Because he has to. There's no other way to the pipeline."

The deputy director sighed. "Anyway, the hospital released Mrs. Seth this morning. She's gone home with Stephen."

"Keep an eye on the house," Rand suggested. "I'm going to spend the week-end learning what I can about Greg Carter."

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Rand stuck close to Greg Carter for the entire week-end. He was a young man, probably younger than Seth, and he wore clothes the way a men's wear buyer would be expected to. The girls noticed him, and he seemed quite at ease when Rand followed him to a semi-private yacht club on Chesapeake Bay where he appeared to spend a great deal of his time. It was one of the first good boating week-ends of the spring season, with only a scattering of clouds against a clear blue sky.

Carter left the yacht club only once—late Saturday afternoon—to drive to a small printing shop in Orchard Beach. The sign in the window advertised wedding invitations, letterheads, business cards —all with 24-hour service. Rand wondered which was Greg Carter's special interest, but he did not want to reveal himself by questioning the printer too soon.

Carter returned to work on Monday morning, and Rand was in the deputy director's office that afternoon. He recounted his week-end activities, and then asked about Seth and his wife.

"They seem peaceful enough now. Actually, we can't keep him under suspension indefinitely. We're either going to have to bring him back in or prefer some sort of charges." The deputy director glanced at the reports before him. "Oh, our man watching the house reported one interesting thing on Saturday. A delivery from that Baltimore department store."

Rand came alert. "What? Where Carter works?"

"The same. It looked like a pair of shoes."

"The message he left in the store typewriter—it ended with the words *deliver Saturday.*"

The deputy director nodded. "And the one we found in her purse said *deliver Monday.*"

"That would have been an old message, one he wrote out for her to type at the store. They probably take turns using that machine. She goes when he's at work."

"Is it safer than a telephone call?" the deputy director asked.

"It is in your country," Rand reminded him. "Wiretaps may be illegal in court, but anyone around Washington knows there's a great deal of it still going on."

"So what do we do now?"

"We watch. And wait."

They did not have long to do either. On Wednesday afternoon, just before store closing time, Stephen Seth once more drove into Baltimore. He parked at the same place and entered the department store by the same door. This time a woman was trying the typewriter, and he glanced at a nearby rack of greeting cards until she had finished. Then he typed four lines and departed.

Rand read them with casual interest. He already knew what to expect:

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3 Links
7 Hams
8 Jacks
Deliver Friday

Later, with the deputy director, he went over his plan. "We'll be watching the house Friday morning. When the truck comes, we grab the package."

"You think he passes the information to the delivery man?"

"That's something we'll find out," Rand hedged.

"How many men do we need?"

"Three or four should do it. And one other thing—"

"Yes?"

"Notify the Secret Service."

Friday was a gloomy April morning, with streets still slick from an all-night rain. Rand and the deputy director parked their car a half block down the street and waited. The others were out of sight, behind houses or in passing vehicles. If Seth looked out, the street would seem normal for the morning hour.

The delivery truck turned into the street at a little before 11:00 and stopped at a corner house. They watched the driver drop off a hatbox and then return to his truck. He drove slowly down the street, watching the numbers, until he came to the Seth house. Then he parked at the curb and started up the front walk with his package. It was another shoebox, as Rand had expected.

"Now!" he said, seeing Stephen Seth in the doorway, hand outstretched for the package.

They came from both sides and from across the street in a diminishing semicircle. Men in raincoats, walking purposefully. Seth saw them and grabbed the package. Then he started to run across the yard, away from Rand and the deputy director. As Rand broke into a run after him, he had a glimpse of Harriet Seth's terrified face in the doorway.

"We've got you, Seth," Rand shouted, but the man kept running across the lawns, perhaps not knowing himself where he was headed. Only away, with the shoebox under one arm like a football.

He'd run through two front yards before Rand brought him down with a flying tackle. Then they were all there, clustered around, as Rand caught his breath and someone handcuffed Seth and the deputy director opened the box.

"Money," he gasped, revealing the bundles of new bills. "A payoff! He's already delivered the information."

Rand shook his head. "There's no Benedict Arnold, no Peggy Arnold, no Major Andre. They're not spies, and they never were."

"But—"

"You've got the right people for the wrong crime," Rand explained. "Don't you see? We've stumbled

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onto a clever ring of counterfeiters."

They were back in the deputy director's office at NSA. It was afternoon now, but the clouds of morning had not lifted. The rain would begin again soon. It was in the air.

"You knew they were counterfeiters all along," the deputy director accused Rand. "That's why you wanted Secret Service agents present, to make the actual arrest."

Rand leaned back in his chair. "I've known they were counterfeiters for two days, though I must admit that if I were an American I'd probably have tumbled to it much earlier."

"How's that?"

"Seth's so-called shopping lists. *Links, Hams,* and *Jacks.* Those stood, of course, for Lincolns, Hamiltons, and Jacksons—the portraits on your five-, ten-, and twenty-dollar bills."

The deputy director slapped his forehead.

"You see," Rand continued, "it didn't make any sense that Stephen Seth was an enemy agent. After beating his wife and getting suspended by you, he carried on with his shopping-list code as if nothing had happened. A spy would certainly have gone underground, at least temporarily. We deceived ourselves with this Benedict Arnold talk, and with the fact that Seth had key information about the bomb-detection network. Actually, he was using his frequent trips around the country not to spy, but to distribute quantities of the counterfeit money to a network of customers for it."

"And Greg Carter?"

"Carter had the counterfeit bills printed at a small shop in Orchard Beach. When Seth received requests for quantities of the money from his customers around the country, he or Harriet would leave a message in the demonstration typewriter at the store. *6 Hams* meant six hundred counterfeit ten-dollar bills, and so on. They only listed *Links, Hams,* and *Jacks* because fives, tens, and twenties are generally the only bills counterfeiters bother about. Ones aren't worth the effort, and fifties are too hard to pass. Anyway, when Carter saw the list in the typewriter at the store, he simply put the desired quantity into a shoebox and sent it out to Seth by the store's regular package delivery system, on the day named. Then Seth shipped it out to his customers, or took it with him on his next trip."

"You got all this from the shopping list?"

"I had a hint in the hospital. Harriet Seth looked absolutely terrified when I took out my wallet to show her the list. It was the wallet that frightened her, and for a while I couldn't figure out

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why. A wallet means money—why should money scare her like that? Well, I finally realized that she was afraid I had some counterfeit bills in the wallet and that I knew about their plot."

"What about Harriet and Carter?"

"I suppose they were having an affair and Seth found out. I'll leave that part for them to work out—if they're still interested after they get out of prison."

"I feel guilty having kept you here," the deputy director murmured. "There were no spies after all."

"It was good exercise for me," Rand said with a smile. "I'll tell them about it, back in London."

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a *NEW* mystification by

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Occasionally—only very occasionally—we give you a story that is not precisely in the genre—not, for example, a story of ratiocination or procedural detection, or a serious fictional study of crime, or a tale of espionage. A few readers of EQMM have objected to this exception-to-the-rule, even when the exception occurs only once or twice a year (one or two stories out of more than 150). But remembering that the exception does prove the rule, by contrast and percentage, isn't it a desirable change of reading pace to include a rare story of pure mystery, or of horror, or even of the supernatural? Usually when we bring you this exceptional story, it has much to recommend it besides change of pace: literary quality; or a sense of discovery, especially in some inexplicably neglected tale of the past; or a perceptive glimpse of the unknown and even of the unknowable . . .

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At the age of ten Jean Anouilh began to write plays in verse, ambitious imitations of Edmond Rostand. When he finally went to Paris, at 21 and now passionately interested in the theater, he became secretary to Louis Jouvet, the famous actor-manager. Anouilh had his first play produced the following year, 1932, and when he married his first wife they were so poor that Jouvet lent them the set of the previous production to use as furniture.

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Since those "La Boheme" days Anouilh has written more than 30 plays, most of which have been performed all over the world. Today Jean Anouilh is considered the most popular living playwright in Europe. He is popular in America too—remember his BECKET*?—especially the motion-picture version, with its marvelous scenes and confrontations, starring Richard Burton as Thomas Becket and Peter O'Toole as King Henry II.*

Eric Bentley has described Anouilh as an artist "whose complex mind requires a complex vehicle." And Edward Owen Marsh has written that Anouilh's greatest dramatic virtues are "the characters and the poetry in them, the brilliantly sensitive manner in which he builds up our relationship to them and swings us into their tragic or fantastic predicament."

Tragic and fantastic predicament—exactly what you will find in the Jean Anouilh story we now offer...

THE MOMENT IS NEAR

by JEAN ANOUILH
(translated by Miriam John)

IT COULD HAVE BEEN TWO IN THE morning. I was apparently coming home from the cinema and had no doubt spun out the evening at a *brasserie* near St. Germain-des-Pres where I am a faithful customer.

I am a temperate man and if I do have a drink or two over a friendly discussion some evenings, I can take my liquor. Robonard, my old schoolmate, who had undoubtedly accompanied me to my door, had just left me.

As a matter of fact, by an agreement dating back to when we were twelve—when I was stronger and smarter than he was and therefore the boss of our group—Robonard always came home with me. The most he would allow himself on those evenings when we were very late was to leave me at the first *metro* past the one where he normally would have caught his train. Later, a considerable inheritance and a certain degree of literary success for him—while I still lived idly on a small private income—had upset the deep significance of our arrangement; but Robonard, who for all other purposes had

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got into the habit of treating me as his inferior, continued faithfully to see me home.

So there is no doubt that I had taken leave of him only a few seconds earlier. We had walked home from the *brasserie*—first of all, because it was a fine night and as we both loved Paris we never took a taxi except in foul weather; and secondly, because that morning's paper, which I have since found and consulted, had quite definitely announced a taxi strike that day.

Moreover, Robonard, who is always boasting of his amatory prowess, is not in fact a very sturdy man. You may say that some apparently puny men are nevertheless surprisingly vigorous. Admitted. They are capable of short violent action—a quick knockout blow, a high jump, an almighty tug. But obviously such people are not muscularly equipped for hard, prolonged effort—such as carrying a man more than a quarter of a mile. I have known Robonard for thirty years and I am sure that he, at any rate, is incapable of such a feat.

Another thing strikes me as of the first importance. If this *thing* had existed, we could never have had the sort of conversation we were having. Now, I have an infallible memory. My friends have confirmed this time and time again; in fact, among themselves they have always nicknamed me "old memory man." I have only to hear a passage of poetry, even a long one, to be able to recite it by heart several days or weeks afterward.

So I have more reason to remember a conversation in which I took an active part. During the entire walk from the *brasserie* to my house—although Robonard now says he remembers nothing of it—we were talking about a holiday we were planning in the Auvergne that summer. It was a walking holiday—not a motoring trip as he sometimes maintains it must have been. Not only that. We discussed details such as the advisability of wearing two pairs of socks or greasing our feet as one does in the Army. We should certainly not have been talking this way about a motoring trip, particularly if the *thing* had already existed.

Robonard had just left me at the door, then, or perhaps at the corner—I admit I am not entirely clear on this point, but it could only have made a difference of a few yards. I took my keys from my pocket and opened the door of the small house—an inheritance from my aunt—where I live with my wife and two children.

There is a stone doorstep, about seven inches high at the sides, worn down to about four inches at most in the center. Having opened the door, I went to step over this—and fell. As the worn part of the step is nearest the

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street there is an unevenness of the surface, width-ways, which seemed to be a simple explanation of my fall. I had never before tripped at that spot, but my wife had sprained her ankle there rather badly a few years back and the children were always tumbling over it when they were small.

I got up cursing, pushed the door open, and leaning against the wall, fumbled for the nearest light switch. There are two of them, connected by a sort of "come-and-go" system. I had got up at a point halfway between them and was standing at the foot of three stairs leading to the glass door of the vestibule, where the second switch is. I decided to make for this one. The steps are familiar to me and I had no need of a light to guide me up them. I took one step—and down I went again. I got up, and fell down another time. A third attempt met with the same result.

At this stage I asked myself the simple question: had I been drinking too much?

I cast my mind back to the *brasserie,* recalling the four beer mats near Robonard's elbow. We had been drinking, then, but no more than four beers between us. Robonard confirmed this later. So did Emile, the old waiter who served us regularly. I felt perfectly well, but thought to myself: Perhaps I'm a bit under the weather. Maybe that's why the beer had this rather unusual effect.

At my next attempt I tripped going up the stairs. Climbing up on my hands and knees I managed to pull myself upright, clinging to the wall. It was then that I felt a sort of unsteadiness in my whole body which I put down to my supposed malaise, although my stomach was not upset and my pulse seemed regular. I switched on the light. It revealed the reassuring decor of the hall, divested of that sort of secret menace which the most familiar objects seem to hold in the dark. I noticed my hat and stick on the floor and bent to pick them up. I lost my balance and toppled down the stairs.

It is impossible for me to describe my bewilderment at that moment. But it gave place to another sensation when, glancing automatically toward my feet, *I found they were no longer there.*

When I left the house I had been wearing black box-calf shoes of the type known as "derby." I had bought them at a shop in the Boulevard Saint-Germain, after hesitating between this pair and some tan ones which I can still describe exactly. Now, not only were these shoes no longer on my feet but, as I say, I had no feet.

At first I had a stupid thought: I must have fallen more violently than I had thought and somehow cut them off. I would call for help. But my thoughts were quicker than my voice, which made a

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strangled sound in my throat. One does not cut off one's feet in a fall. It was absurd. Besides, I was not bleeding. And where my feet should have been there were two wooden stumps encased in leather.

I had married for love. For seventeen years nothing had tarnished the deep tenderness of my relations with my wife. She was the soul of gentleness and kindness. I had watched her bring up our children without ever raising her voice or striking them. I ought also to confess that she had accepted one or two of my extra-marital escapades without a word of bitterness. I am a mollycoddle, and catch cold easily. Angele had always nursed my little ailments with the same attention and tender anxiety as if they had been serious illnesses. I had even got into the habit, wrapped as I was in the cotton-wool of her sweetness, of running to her like a child to its mother at the slightest ache or pain.

When I found myself lying in this pitiable state my first thought was to call her. I would have done so if I had merely banged my head on the door jamb. So you can imagine how urgently, and with what trust in her maternal tenderness, I did so when I suddenly found myself without feet.

A long moment passed, during which I lay prostrate in the hall, breathing with difficulty, awhirl with bewildering images, none of which I could keep fixed before my eyes.

At last I heard her step on the stairs. She appeared. Incapable of speech I made some inarticulate sounds and pointed to my feet—to where they should have been. She did not seem in the least surprised, but simply gave me a look of utter disapproval such as I had never seen on her face before.

One detail impressed itself on me. Her face, hard as it now was, seemed to be much older! She looked at me for a few seconds in silence, then shrugged and coldly let fall the strange remark: "You see, Paul, I was right."

I thought she had not noticed my mutilation. I was still incapable of speech and it is perhaps understandable that this fresh blow did nothing to help me regain my use of words. Pointing to my stumps I stammered, "Look—there..."

Her eyes followed the direction of my finger. I expected a cry of horror, pity, love, astonishment, anything—but a cry. All she said was: "Yes, yes. You haven't broken them this time, but you will if you persist in going out with only one stick. You'll break your back, too."

At last I found my voice sufficiently to roar: "But aren't you surprised?"

She replied quite calmly, "You've always been a bit odd, if that's what you mean."

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Then she turned on her heel, calling negligently over her shoulder, "I'll get Leonie—she'll help you up. I can't, with this hernia. Don't shout again, you'll wake up the children."

At these words I once more found myself powerless to speak coherently, and simply mumbled a few syllables to which she did not even listen. Then I was alone, overcome with horror.

After a minute or two, swallowing my saliva, I heard myself say in a low voice, "But, Angele, you haven't got a hernia."

No sooner had I said this than the phrase bored its way dizzily into my mind like a devilish little torpedo in whose path all accepted notions exploded in a cloud of splinters, which in their turn exploded into still smaller particles.

"Angele hasn't got a hernia. Imagine Angele unable to exert herself! I can see her again as she was yesterday, lifting a great trunk to store away some old clothes in it. I helped her get the thing down from the loft! So I had my feet all right. If I had them yesterday, Angele ought to have been startled at my not having them today. Good as she is, she ought to have been more than startled—she should have been moved to tears at my miserable predicament. But no. Such calm, such coldness could only be born of habit..."

I examined all the possibilities. If I had already been without feet for a long time—and supposing I had been the only one not to have noticed it—I am sure that, with her tender and loving nature, Angele would have redoubled her attentions, so that I should not suffer mentally from my disability. So she herself must have changed inexplicably, both physically and psychologically. She had become hard, sour—and she had a rupture. For never, never—and this idea kept bobbing back into my consciousness so that I wanted to chant it over and over again like a child—never would my wife, normally so kind and maternal, have left it to a stranger like Leonie to help me up and especially to comfort me.

Leonie! The name suddenly struck me. Who was Leonie?

We had only one servant, who had been with us for years. Her name was Marthe. Could my wife be mad?

The idea dawned on me suddenly—at last, to my immense relief, throwing the light of an acceptable reality on everything that had happened. My wife was mad—that was the answer. She had mentioned a hernia which she did not have, and a servant named Leonie, whereas ours was called Marthe. That must be it—she was mad. It was horrible, but at least it was a reality. Deep down beneath my affectionate concern for her I felt almost a sort of relief, a sort of shameful happiness which

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I struggled to overcome in order to concentrate on the pitiful state of my poor wife.

Another thought suddenly began to nibble at my peace of mind. If it was my wife who was mad, how was it that before she arrived, before she had said a word—in fact, in a series of events on which her madness could have had no influence—I had fallen four times and then discovered that I had no feet?

A sharp tremor ran through me. It was not my wife who was mad—it was I. Victim of some strange hallucination, of hypnosis perhaps, I imagined I had lost my feet, and my body, responding to this notion, had lost its balance. I recalled a little Breton casino where I had seen an Arab hypnotist "put under" a man I had been talking to on the beach the same morning, making him dodge an imaginary motor car on an empty stage. The memory reassured me. My feet were well and truly there. Just a bit of will power and I should be able to break the spell. With a weak smile, for I only half believed in this temporary hallucination, I tried to pull myself up. But I collapsed, giving myself this time a nasty blow on the elbow.

As I had luckily preserved my solid good sense, I decided to await events without any more of these hazardous efforts.

This rational decision made me feel better. I clung to the idea that a madman would not have made such a decision. A madman would have insisted, even at the risk of maiming himself, on proving that he was not mad. I therefore told myself that if my madness had consisted in my not seeing my feet and behaving as though I had none, then firstly I should not have been surprised and should not have fallen down so many times in making the discovery, and secondly, my wife would have called to me to get up, told me I had nothing the matter with me, instead of warning me I might break my legs, and then getting someone to help me up. One thing seemed certain: it was her impression, as well as mine, that my two feet were missing. If any third person confirmed this, there could be no further doubt about it. So I must wait until the servant came.

Footsteps creaked on the stairs. A large dark-skinned woman, unknown to me, appeared in a nightgown. My wife followed her, colder than ever.

"Come along, Leonie," she was saying, "help Monsieur get up and put him to bed."

I watched the woman come toward me, and the look in my eyes prompted her to remark, misjudging the fear she inspired in me: "Don't be afraid, Monsieur. Monsieur knows I never hurt him when I help him up. *Monsieur even says I am the only one who knows how to.*"

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At these words an icy darkness engulfed me. In this darkness a sort of absurd will-o'-the-wisp kept bobbing about, disappearing and reappearing: "We are all mad. We are all mad. We are *all* mad."

I let the woman pull me up, and leaned on her. At the same moment a mild but comforting ray of sunshine melted the desolate landscape of my thoughts. How stupid of me! I was simply dreaming!

I made an effort to wake up, stretching my eyelids wide-open. Then, remembering something I had read when I was a boy, I took hold of a safety pin in the woman's dressing gown and stuck it sharply into my finger. A pain shot through me. Blood spurted.

"Heavens!" wailed the woman. "Now Monsieur has to go and prick his finger!"

"A nice patient to have," said the colorless voice of my wife behind us. "What were you doing with that pin? You might at least *try* to make things easier for us."

I said nothing, but let myself be put to bed.

I lay for a long time in the dark without moving. Then, unable to endure it any longer, I switched on the bedside lamp. At the place where my feet usually made a little hillock—I sleep on my back—the bedclothes were absolutely flat. On a chair I caught sight of the two appliances they had removed from my feet. I looked at them vacantly. The whirlwind of impressions which had followed the discovery of my infirmity had now given place to a sort of stupefaction, as though I had been dealt a severe blow on the head.

Surprising as it was to see the two false limbs lying at the bedside of a man who had got up that morning—as I was sure I had—absolutely sound and nimble, my confused mind was concerned with one question only: how difficult it must be to put them on. I tried for a long time to imagine the manipulation which would be necessary the next morning to get my stumps into them—if my strange condition were to last until then. A childish, almost amused curiosity took over from my anxiety. I no longer questioned why I had been suddenly deprived of my feet, but only how this strap fitted that buckle, what this pad was for, whether it was possible to get one's trousers on alone after fitting the things on, and so on.

In the end I could no longer resist. I sat on the edge of the bed, drew the two appliances toward me, and set about fitting them on to my legs. I had a lot of difficulty with the first one, but when it was firmly attached I was rewarded by a sense of great satisfaction. I put the other one on without difficulty. Then, without any definite purpose in mind, I got dressed and prepared to go out.

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As I went downstairs—on my backside as I did not want to wake anyone or, worse still, fall down again—I heard the dining-room clock strike six. In the hall I found two sticks with rubber ferrules. I did not recognize them, but took them both and left the house.

After the first few steps I was astonished at my skill with the sticks. I walked almost without lurching, leaning simultaneously on one leg and the opposite stick. The exercise even amused me and after a few tries I promised myself to learn to walk expertly with only one stick.

I arrived at the corner of the road and just as I was preparing to turn into the Boulevard I felt a sudden pang at the heart. The woman at the dairy where we had been customers for a very long time and where, when the maid was away, I sometimes did a bit of shopping, was just opening the shutters. She would obviously see me pass, be taken unawares, and start asking extremely embarrassing questions.

But it was too late to retrace my steps. I was just about to decide on hiding my face behind the collar of my overcoat when suddenly she turned round. I blushed, utterly at a loss, but her eyes registered no surprise whatever and she said quite simply, as if the sight of me without feet and leaning on two invalid's sticks was the most natural thing in the world: "Up already? Have a nice walk, Monsieur Mauvette."

I scarcely had the strength to raise a faint smile and as soon as I reasonably could, I continued on my way. After covering a few hundred meters along the Boulevard I collapsed on a bench.

I then set myself to serious reflection. There could no longer be any question of trying to amuse myself with these gadgets. Where were my feet? Yesterday I had left the house, my two feet normally shod—that I knew perfectly well. I had been to the cinema, met Robonard at our usual *brasserie*, chatted with him over four halves of beer, and walked back with him, still chatting, noticing nothing strange during the whole procedure.

So when could I have lost my feet? After all, feet are not so easily lost in the heart of Paris in the Twentieth Century. I simply must find them again.

Trying to reason calmly I arrived at the solution I ought to have thought of in the first place, since my own memory could not supply me with any details. The best thing would be to go and question my friend, Robonard, who had not left me yesterday during the whole time when my feet could conceivably have parted company with me. Perhaps he had noticed something.

Robonard lived quite near, on

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the Boulevard itself. I made toward his house, already visible from where I was because the front had recently been cleaned and it made a white patch among the others. As a matter of fact, as I approached it, it seemed to me to be less white than I remembered. I was already pondering on how dirty the lovelier parts of Paris were becoming with fumes and smoke when my heart missed a beat. I was certainly being dogged by bad luck. The concierge was beating a mattress on the street.

I passed as quickly as I could but she must have recognized me because I had hardly gone under the archway when she called out, "Monsieur Mauvette!"

This time there was no getting out of it. I was going to be assailed with questions. I turned round in great confusion.

"Well, Monsieur Mauvette," she said, laughing.

I had not yet had time to acquire the sort of susceptibility peculiar to invalids, but nevertheless her laugh displeased me and I replied sourly, "Well what?"

The woman began to laugh more heartily.

"These learned people, how absent-minded they are! True, one does get into habits—"

"What habits?" I interrupted.

"Ah, you are making fun of me," she said, suddenly drawing herself up and no doubt thinking that even concierges were not safe from misplaced pleasantries. "Come, now, you know very well that Monsieur Robonard doesn't live here any more."

Had Robonard moved since last night without a word to me? I was on the point of protesting and questioning her, but the strange hours I had recently lived through had made me cautious. I saluted her without a word and took myself off.

So it seemed that since last night all kinds of things had been happening. I had lost my feet; my wife had had some sort of accident; we had changed our maid; and Robonard had gone to live somewhere else.

It was altogether too much. I felt a kind of hot wave engulf me. There was a ringing in my ears and I fell to the ground . . .

I came to myself in a pharmacist's shop. As soon as I opened my eyes, a policeman who was standing beside me asked me my address, intending, it seemed, to accompany me home. I thanked him for his courtesy, paid the few francs the pharmacist asked for his services, and assuring them that I was used to these episodes and that they were not serious, I left the shop.

Outside, however, I encountered a group of loiterers waiting for me to emerge. As I went off they followed me, perhaps in the unhealthy hope of seeing me fall

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down again. Embarrassed by their persistence, I looked up and down the street: not a taxi to be seen—the strike was still on. In my present state there could be no question of hurrying on, so I turned aside to the nearest shop window and began to examine it, with assumed intentness, in the hope of discouraging them. Gradually I began to feel better, and actually saw what I had been staring at for the past minute—a pair of shoes. I had stopped, purely by chance, in front of a shoe store.

I was soon fancying myself the victim of hallucinations. The pair next to those I had been gazing at—black box-calf marked at Frs. 165—were *mine*.

I stepped back and for a moment the reality seemed simpler. It was not my pair of shoes but their twin. In fact, I was looking at the shop where, a few days before, I had bought the pair which had disappeared in the night along with my feet.

As much from some obscure presentiment as to bolster myself, I continued to scrutinize the black box-calf shoes. Behind me the loiterers were beginning to exchange idiotic jokes. The sight of this man without feet studying shoes seemed infinitely comic to them.

Trying not to hear them I concentrated my attention on the shoes. It was then that there occurred the most curious event of a morning already packed with mysteries. One of the shoes, without anyone touching the green curtain at the back of the window, began to move very slightly, at regular intervals, as though giving me a sign.

I do not believe in the supernatural. I have studied science quite seriously and call myself an enlightened materialist, without illusions. I forced myself to look at another pair of shoes; then, calmly, I glanced at the black pair again. This time it was the other shoe which gave me the signal.

Again I looked away. I counted up to one hundred, then recited mentally a few lines of Verlaine, my favorite poet, to reassure myself as to my complete clarity of mind. Then I looked back at the pair of box-calf shoes. This time both shoes moved together!

I was gripped by a sort of paternal emotion, and my heart began to pound as though it would burst. There was no longer any doubt. There were my feet... Careless of the burst of laughter which shook the onlookers I went into the shop.

Long discussions were needed to overcome the resistance of the salesman and, after him, of the manager. These two men did not want to sell me the shoes in the window, and certainly not the shoetrees inside them—or what they called shoetrees—despite my offer of extra payment. There

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were, they kept repeating obstinately, much more suitable shoetrees; these was a trade model for window display, heavy and difficult to insert. Finally, for fear of losing a sale, they let me have them for thirty francs, profiting from my insistence by selling me a two years' supply of socks, polish, and laces.

The crowd outside was chattering as I got to the door. They began to follow me again. I walked for a long time, to shake them off, and it was nearly midday before the last and most persistent of them, a young idler in jeans, at last decided to look away for a moment as he passed a cycle shop. I turned quickly into the first side street and after several detours found myself once more alone near the Luxembourg Gardens.

My decision was made. At the nearest hardware store I bought a strong, sharp-edged knife. Then I made for a public lavatory and shut myself in one of the cubicles. I opened my parcel and took out one of the wooden shoetrees. I made a hole in the middle somehow or other, and cutting the end of my wooden leg I fitted it in. I did the same with the other and, still supporting myself on my sticks, left the public convenience without the attendant noticing any change in me.

I walked like this with more difficulty than before, but for the first time since my strange discovery I felt a kind of inner calm.

Nearly an hour must have gone by. I had had nothing to eat or drink and had been walking for a long time, rather painfully. I was feeling very weak, and decided to go and have a drink in one of the cafes of the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Just as I was crossing the road to reach the one I usually favored in the *quartier,* I heard an uproar and a clash of metal and saw a huge shape rear over me.

I did not lose consciousness, however, but simply shut my eyes for a second as though dazzled. When I opened them again, there were people jostling and shouting all round me. There was blood about. Someone lifted me and a frightful pain wrenched at me. I gave a cry, to which there were cries in response from the women in the crowd. Someone kept calling out: "Stand back, for God's sake! Stand back!"

As they were carrying me away, I gradually sank into a deep pit of darkness. However, I did hear a distant, muffled voice saying, "Poor man. It's horrible. His feet have been cut off."

I stayed in the hospital for a week and was then transferred to a clinic where I was able to receive my friends and family more conveniently. During these first phases of my convalescence Angele was a model of gentleness and goodness.

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Robonard did his best to distract me. But underneath our friendliness, which seemed equal on both sides, there was now my horrible secret. Every day I promised myself I would tell him about it, and every day I put it off to the next.

One afternoon he arrived in high spirits, rubbing his hands. He had some time ago made the acquaintance of a young girl who exactly suited him, but I knew that family difficulties had so far made their marriage impossible. He told me that these difficulties had been smoothed out and that the wedding had been fixed for the following month. He confided that he was going to leave the Boulevard Saint-Germain and live in an old *hotel* at Versailles that belonged to his future wife.

It was a month since my accident, and therefore a month since I had heard from the concierge about his move. Had he been keeping it from me? This lack of trust shocked me.

"I don't know why you call me your friend," I said to him. "After knowing me intimately for thirty years you hardly need to lie so clumsily. You moved over a month ago."

He protested and swore on oath that he was still living in the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and that he could not leave there before the fifteenth of the following month.

I became rather tearful and said bitterly, "You are taking advantage of my helplessness." Then I told him what the concierge had said.

"You've been dreaming," he said, "or else she was joking."

At these words I could no longer contain myself and began to tell him everything.

When I had finished, Robonard shook his head and said simply, "Yes, yes. It's all very strange. But what of it? The best thing is not to think any more about it."

He quickly changed the subject and on some pretext or other left. I realized that to his embarrassment he thought I was mad. This inflamed me and I asked my wife to see to it that Robonard and I were never left alone together again. He, on the other hand, cunningly contrived to bring a mutual friend with him whenever he came to see me. Then he began to space out his visits, finally contenting himself with merely telephoning for news of me.

I came back home soon, with two rubber-ferruled sticks and—a curious detail this—artificial feet which I must long since have learned to use.

But my accident and the memory of the strange mystery which had preceded it had left me taciturn. I treated my wife less and less as I had done before—that is, as my confidante and friend. Isolated as I was in my phantasmagoria, I had lost confidence in her,

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as I had in everyone else.

This attitude made my wife herself more sullen. But I soon noticed that my silence was not the only reason for her change toward me. Very simple in her tastes, she had nevertheless loved the easy, varied, though unadventurous life we had led before my mutilation. Our travels and outings now became rarer; she grew bored and embittered. Not daring, after such a long and happy relationship, to reporach me for her botched-up life, she reached the point of blaming me obscurely for her boredom, and little by little came to love me less.

At first she had taken infinite care to spare me the small nuisances of my new condition. These precautions slackened off. One day I even thought I detected in her face an expression of hostility, similar to the one I had observed that strange night when I had fallen down in the hall.

Shortly after this she had a violent argument with our old servant, Marthe, and despite my resistance gave her notice. The same evening she engaged a new servant from the agency, but did not let me see her. At dinner, however, I was startled to hear her say to the girl, who had come into the dining room without my seeing her, "Leonie, you've forgotten the saltcellar."

I turned round and almost choked over my soup.

Smiling, but, as it seemed to me, a little less corpulent, there stood behind me the dark-complexioned woman who had helped me up on the night *it* had happened.

It was too much. This time I was truly going mad. I hurried over dinner and calling a taxi I had myself driven to Robonard's house.

He received me somewhat guardedly and introduced me to his wife without comment. I made it clear that I wanted to speak to him alone. He seemed to be rather afraid of this, but he agreed. I told him everything—the whole story.

I was at such pains to keep calm and offered so unreservedly to take him to the shoe shop, to the hardware store, and to the public lavatory that I succeeded in overcoming his skepticism. We telephoned my home that he was putting me up for the night and the next morning we went back to Paris together.

The salesman who had sold me the first pair of shoes had left, but the one who had sold me the second pair remembered me perfectly, and so did the manager. When Robonard cautiously inquired of the latter whether he also remembered having seen me with my artificial feet on the day of my weird errand, he smiled in a rather embarrassed fashion and admitted that this factor had accounted for much of his hesitation

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in selling me the shoes and shoe-trees from the window. He was afraid he was dealing with a practical joker or, worse, a lunatic. We went on to check with him in his records that the purchase had taken place on the morning of my accident.

Our inquiries at the hardware store and with the lavatory attendant were equally conclusive.

And so, very perplexed, we went and sat on the terrace of the cafe on the Boulevard Saint-Michel which I had failed to reach before.

Robonard drank and smoked for a long time without a word. Then he looked me hard in the face and said, "Mauvette, I think I understand. What has happened is terrible. Not only for you but for all of us."

He was silent for a long moment during which I dared not question him, then he went on in a heavy voice, "Ever since the world began, things have gone on in time according to a certain order which has never been disturbed—an order in which our human will has a part, of course, but a part which is itself predetermined. If what you tell me is so—and our inquiries this morning unfortunately prove that it is—I believe that you, Mauvette, a simple Paris citizen of private means, will in a million years' time—if our history gets that far—be more famous among the inhabitants of another solar system than our most celebrated heroes."

I confess that at this point of his discourse I in turn felt certain doubts about his mental balance.

He seemed not to notice, and continued, "One evening you suddenly found yourself without your feet; you found your wife grown suddenly harsh; your maid Marthe changed for another maid—Leonie; and then on the following day you fell under a motor car. Now, let's be logical. The earlier events could not—indeed, did not—take place until *after* your accident. *And so for you, and for you alone, there was an error in time.* You lived a moment of the future *before it was due,* and inevitably this reversal of time will lead to another, which in turn will lead to others, and these to others, all growing more and more serious. There has been a mistake in the system. However small it is, it makes the end of the world inevitable, sooner or later. But for you, Mauvette, time might have had a chance of lasting out."

He drank a little and said sadly, "Mauvette, when I used to stamp on your toes for fun at school, who would have thought it would be your feet that would bring about the end of the world!"

It was two in the morning and the manager asked us to leave.

Since then I have often thought of Robonard's words and the mon-

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strous consequences of my misfortune have greatly diminished the bitterness in me.

I go about as usual with my friend, for he has been pining for cafe life and has returned to live in Paris.

I often come home at two in the morning, but never open my door without my heart pounding as though it will burst; for I always wonder what fate has in store when I reach that moment in time which I have already lived.

My wife ruptured herself lifting a suitcase when we came back from our last holiday. This fact, her wrinkled face, and the daily increasing corpulence of Leonie enable me, when I connect them with my memories of that tragic night, to foretell that *the moment is near.*

With all my heart I hope, as indeed Robonard made me believe, that on that evening—since nothing new is ever created and nothing old is ever lost—I shall relive those moments of my past life whose place was taken by *that moment.*

So, for a few hours, I shall again have my feet.

In my happiness at thus temporarily escaping my painful fate, I intend to hold a wonderful celebration with those young, charming, purchasable girls whom I have formed the habit of frequenting, so that I may make love to them as before, without reading in their eyes the scarcely perceptible disgust which belies their smile.

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FIRST PRIZE WINNER NUMBER 7

Thomas Flanagan's First Prize Winner of 1951 proved to be the first of a series of stories about Major Tennente, a professional soldier who is also a professional policeman. The author told us that he first "saw" Tennente in such things as a trivial gesture, a limp, a turn of phrase, but finally "saw" him as a way of thinking in a particular landscape in the world of 1951. Are we not deeply concerned, the author reminded us in 1951, with the man of today who finds himself pushed into an ambiguous, even untenable position? Tennente is that man: as a professional soldier he wants more than anything else to live by the code of honor; yet he lives in a world where honor no longer seems to have meaning.

Major Tennente is a military policeman in the service of his country—which is to say, in the service of its ruler, the General. Tennente has no choice but to carry out the letter of the law; but the spirit of the law—which Tennente cannot and will not overlook—obviously means different things to the General and to the Major. The General, who might be any tyrant in any part of the world, has created a way of life in which only the lie, the evasion, and the constant shadow of cruelty have meaning. That is not Tennente's way of life, but it is Tennente's fate, and the fate of so many others, to find themselves caught, perhaps trapped, in such a way of living.

So Tennente asks himself: "In such a world as this, how may one be decent?" Is the real answer, the only answer, that one cannot? Can a nation or a political program be so hopelessly corrupt that to touch it, or to be touched by it, is to become permanently infected? Tennente fights to escape the trap: he makes the dangerous attempt to be, in the best of times and the worst of times, a decent man . . .

'Q'

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THE COLD WINDS OF ADESTA

by THOMAS FLANAGAN

"THERE ARE THE HEADLIGHTS," the young lieutenant said. "He is coming." The lieutenant, in his fur-collared greatcoat, was standing by the dirt-streaked window, looking across the pass.

"How long does the trip take?" Major Tennente asked.

"It is five minutes from the border of the Republic, and he is under observation all that time. We can watch his lights."

Tennente drew a thin twisted cigar from his pocket and lit it. The wind hurled itself against the hut, shaking the single window. He looked up from the chair in which he was sitting, and in the light of the flickering gasoline lamp he seemed old to the lieutenant. The yellow light caught his hollowed-out cheeks, his thin hooked nose, but left his eyes in shadow.

"Is it always like this here?" he asked.

"This is a bad night and the bad season," Lieutenant Bonares said. "It is the wind cutting down the pass between the mountains. They speak of the cold winds of Adesta."

Tennente did not reply. He held the cigar between his teeth, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He watched the young lieutenant at the window place his hand nervously on his automatic, then drop it to his side. A whistle blew shrilly.

"He has passed the roadblock," Bonares said. "The men outside will stop him now."

When the lieutenant had left the hut, Tennente stood up, a thin bent man, and, limping slightly, walked to the window. The heavy, closed truck had been halted before the hut, and by the light of the full moon Tennente could see Bonares speaking to the driver, who was gesturing angrily. Bonares turned to the two slouching troopers and they walked toward the truck. The driver climbed down then and went with Bonares to the hut.

He knows his work, that young man, Tennente thought. He continued to stare out the window when he heard the door open behind him. The moon illuminated the mountainsides and the winding road between them, and he could see, far off, the lighted windows of the Republic frontier post across the border. Then he turned.

The driver was a soft fleshy man, incongruously dressed in cap and windbreaker. There was a dead cigarette in the corner of his strangely thin mouth, which gave

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him a puckish, age-denying quality.

"This is Gomar," the lieutenant said. "We are old friends by now, aren't we, Gomar?"

Gomar smiled amusedly at Tennente, whom he had been watching through half-closed eyes, and shrugged.

"You transport wines?" Tennente asked.

"Anything but wines. Ask the lieutenant here. I carry guns, drugs, women. Whatever you say I carry."

"He brings wine from the Republic," Bonares said.

Tennente stepped away from the window and walked across the loose planking to the center of the room. His eyes, the eyes of a tired, watchful hawk, were no longer in shadow. "Listen to me, Gomar. I will give you a wise thought. When I speak to you, answer me properly. Answer me clearly and plainly."

"Yes," Gomar said. "I transport wine."

"We produce much wine in this country," Tennente said. He removed the cigar from his strong, discolored teeth. "You can't make money by bringing more in."

"That is my affair. If I don't use this pass, I will use one far to the south. If you close all the passes to me, I will ship by boat and then go bankrupt. That is your affair."

"Yes," Tennente said. "It is. But the pass of Adesta is almost never used. Why did you choose it?"

Gomar shrugged. "It was convenient. I carry wine from the Republic. I am licensed in both countries. It is my own concern what pass I use."

"How did you manage to get an importing license?"

"I bribed an official in the capital."

The lieutenant walked toward him stiffly, but Gomar reached in his pocket for a box of matches and re-lit his cigarette.

Tennente chuckled appreciatively. "You are an unusual merchant, Gomar. How is it that you drive your own truck?"

"Perhaps it is because my profits are small. Perhaps it is because I like the night air." Gomar drew in on his cigarette. "And I am tired of questions. My truck is open for inspection."

Tennente looked at him a moment, then said, "Thank you." He jerked his head and the others followed him outside. The wind thrust him back against the door for a moment, but he shook off Bonares' hand. "Show me how you search," he said.

At Bonares' order the troopers opened the truck and removed the casks, placing them on the hard, snow-covered ground in front of the headlights. They shook each cask. They went over the truck carefully. Bonares had trained them well, or perhaps they were particularly zealous in the pres-

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ence of an official from the capital. Then they stood before the major, working their numb, cold-clumsy fingers.

"Open one of the casks," Tennente said.

"That isn't necessary," Gomar said in sudden anger. "You can tell what is in a cask by shaking it. At least, you can tell whether it is wine or guns."

"Why do you think we are looking for guns?" Tennente asked.

"Because I am not a fool. Only gunrunning would bring a major of police to the pass of Adesta in winter."

"Open a cask," Tennente said to the soldiers.

"I am not sure we have orders for that," Bonares said. "You must take the responsibility, Major."

Tennente reached out suddenly and drew the lieutenant's automatic from its holster, flicked off the safety catch, and emptied the gun into one of the casks. The wine ran blood-red on the snow. He handed the gun, butt first, to Bonares, who received it in stunned admiration.

"That wine cost me a great deal of money," Gomar said evenly. "You are a violent man, Major—"

"Tennente."

He saw Gomar's eyes widen imperceptibly. "I understand your violence now, Major. You have that reputation."

Tennente threw down his cigar. "I am not violent, but my temper is short. When you return to town, file a report. It will be buried with a pile of other complaints." He turned to the soldiers, who had been watching him with quiet, frightened eyes. "Load his truck carefully. Wine should not be mistreated."

Tennente watched them, and then watched Gomar's truck begin to move down the twisting, dangerous road toward the lights of the town of Adesta. Then he walked back into the hut, with the lieutenant following him.

Tennente stood wordlessly at the window while Bonares heated coffee on the alcohol stove. When Bonares brought the coffee to him, he wrapped his hands gratefully about the hot white cup and held it without drinking.

"How often does he make the trip?" Tennente asked.

"Every night."

"So? For wine, every night. And how long has he been doing this?"

"He began two weeks ago."

"Where does he go now?"

"There is only one place to go—the town of Adesta. And he does not stop on the road. They have watched his lights. From the terrace of the hotel you can see the road clear up to the hut here." Bonares hesitated, then said, "It is guns we are looking for, isn't it?"

Tennente looked at him. The lieutenant was a slim man and very young. His eyes were clear and dark against his olive skin. "Yes,"

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Tennente said. "It is guns."

"It does not seem possible," Bonares said. "But of course in the capital they understand these things better."

"Why does it not seem possible, Lieutenant?" Tennente asked. He lifted the white cup to his lips and drank from it.

Bonares looked at him perplexedly. "Because we would find them when we search. Unless, of course, Gomar is a ghost."

Tennente turned away from the window and walked to the table where he set down the coffee cup gently. "No, Gomar is not a ghost. But in a sense the guns are. They are dead men's guns."

Bonares began to question him, then changed his mind, and finally asked, "You know how he does it?"

Tennente shook his head. "You can phone to the town for my car, Lieutenant."

The young man hesitated again, then spoke. "Major?"

"Yes?"

"If I can be of help to you while you are here, will you use me?"

"Why are you so anxious to be of use?"

Bonares smiled with engaging candor. "I am a junior lieutenant on a border post. If I am able to help you, in twenty years I may be a senior lieutenant. Why do you ask?"

"In this country everyone is patriotic for a reason," Tennente said. "I like to collect those reasons. It is a hobby of mine. Phone now, Lieutenant."

Colonel Jarel felt that he had reason to be troubled, for Tennente was a troublesome person. Tennente was a rash man and an insolent one. It was said that he was insolent even to the General.

From his office window Jarel could see Tennente crossing the square toward him. The major was carrying the canvas-wrapped package which he had brought with him yesterday, when he first came to Adesta. The colonel, who knew what the package contained, shuddered slightly. The sun still fell in a golden wash on the white buildings and suffused the plaza, and the armed and solitary patrol still moved untroubled among the villagers. But Jarel had only to look again at the hungry, predatory figure approaching his office to lose once more his lightly held ease.

The major had not shaved and his uniform was unpressed; cigars bulged from his tunic pocket, and his garrison cap was pushed back from the high creased forehead. That is how officers looked before the days of the General, Jarel thought. Tennente limped into the room, put the bundle on the desk, and then sat down. The colonel turned away from the window and looked at him. "You saw Gomar last night?" the colonel asked.

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"I saw Gomar. I saw his wine."

"But no guns?"

Tennente shook his head. "No, no guns."

"Because he carries no guns," Jarel said. "Because there are no guns. Not in this region."

"Gomar drives his truck up the pass and into the Republic. When he comes back, he carries guns as well as wine."

Jarel groaned to himself: all that business of yesterday over again, and even after Tennente had made his own inspection. "How?" he asked with constrained politeness.

"I don't know that. Yet."

Jarel walked to the desk and sat behind it facing Tennente, hating the major's drawn, tired face, the watchful eyes. "You have checked the truck. I have checked the truck. Bonares has checked it. The casks are examined. The truck itself is examined. There is only wine."

"Guns come down from the pass," Tennente said, with his maddening, calm indifference. "It is my job to discover how it is done. Your disbelief does not interest me."

You must match this man's calm, Jarel told himself. Tennente is a dangerous man. "It is the disbelief of the commandant of the town of Adesta, Major. It is my duty to see that the public welfare is maintained in this region. I would hardly be so remiss in that duty as to allow a man to enter the country once a night in a truck filled with contraband arms."

Tennente shrugged, and the shrug seemed to imply many things, all of them unflattering. Jarel felt anger working in his mind like a strong liquor. Tennente placed his hand on the canvas bundle which yesterday he had opened for the colonel. "This is one of the guns. Last week the police shot the man who carried it. But there will be many guns and many men carrying them, unless Gomar is shot."

"Shot!" Jarel echoed, but not incredulously; like Gomar, he knew the major by reputation. "You can't shoot a man for transporting wine under license."

"Gomar is not a wine merchant. He is a gunrunner, and that is a capital offense."

Jarel pushed back his chair, stood up, and walked to the wall map. He put a short plump finger on the town of Adesta, and then, by stretching himself, placed the other arm across the border into the Republic. "This is Gomar's route," he said. "He is first searched by the border guards of the Republic, and then, with his truck visible at all times to Bonares, he moves down the mountain road to our hut. There he is searched a second time. Then he continues down into the town, always under the eyes of Bonares and anyone in the valley who cares to look up toward the mountains."

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"Young Bonares," Tennente interrupted. "Do you trust him?"

"I trust him," Jarel said. "He is a bright lad. But I trust no one that much. I have made surprise checks. You have made one yourself. For that matter, the Republic guards have offered to let us assist them in their search."

"Yes," Tennente said. "If we give them sufficient warning."

Jarel, ignoring the major's qualification, turned away from the map. "You must see my position, Major. I have the greatest respect for the secret police, but I will not arrest a man without evidence."

Tennente stroked the shrouded rifle. "Here is your evidence, Colonel. It could only have come from this region. And only Gomar has used the pass."

"You believe the story of the arms cache," Jarel said. "An old wives' tale fifteen years old. A story told in cafes by idlers."

"It is not merely a cafe story. It is a fact of history. The gun cache exists, and in the mountains of Adesta." Tennente's eyes were veiled by their heavy hoods. "In the final days of the General's revolution—"

"War of liberation," Jarel corrected him automatically.

"Thank you. War of liberation. A Government army, the only one to remain intact, moved to this region and crossed to the Republic. They were turned back, and so they returned to this region and into the power of the General. But they returned without their arms. Their arms were buried, either on this side of the pass or the other. And now Gomar has found a way of removing them." Tennente threw the rifle onto the desk. "Do you think I cannot recognize those arms, Colonel?"

"You should be able to," Jarel said. "You were in one of the armies which fought the General."

"Just so," Tennente said courteously. Jarel had noticed that Tennente's infamous temper was his servant; it exploded only when he chose. "And this gun came from the mountains of Adesta."

"Then the guns come either from our side or from the Republic side. If from the Republic side, then Gomar must carry them past the Republic border patrol."

"That might not be difficult to do."

"And then he would have to get them past our guards, and that *is* difficult to do." Jarel stood with his back against the map. There was no reason why he should hold his temper; Tennente was hardly a man in political favor.

"Perhaps they come from our side," Tennente said.

Jarel tugged at the map cord, and the mountains of Adesta shot upward and vanished. "Really, Major Tennente, I am not as ignorant of the details of my command as you suggest." He walked to a steel filing cabinet, rummaged

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through its disorder, and pulled out a wrinkled document. "I have read the report of the military commission, and I presume that you have, as well. Immediately after the revolution—"

"The war of liberation," Tennente said, his face bland.

"—the General sent a commission here. They built a border hut and then searched our side of the border." Jarel untied the red tape, opened the dossier, and extracted a map. It was similar to the one which Tennente had just seen disappear, save in one detail. Jarel placed his short blunt finger on the border post. "Here is the hut they built," he said, "and here is how they searched. Inch by inch. Do you see these circles in red ink? Each circle represents a stage of search. They would have found a single pistol, had it been buried there."

Jarel looked up at Tennente, who had been following him closely. "And now, if the guns exist at all, they are carried down the mountain in a truck which contains only wine. Does that make sense to you?"

"No, but it does not have to make sense, because it happens. You are like the mathematician who confronts the runner at the end of his race and proves to him that he could not have run as fast as he did." Tennente picked up the map, folded it, and slipped it in his tunic pocket.

"Major Tennente—"

"Colonel Jarel." Tennente stood up stiffly. "I did not come here to discuss the niceties of logical demonstration with you."

"Nevertheless, you will have a demonstration. Would you like to have Gomar arrested when he reaches the town tonight?"

"By no means. I am not interested in one load of arms. I am interested in discovering his source of supply and his means of transportation. And then, too, it might develop that tonight he will not be carrying arms."

Jarel walked up to him. "And why not, Major? Because he will be warned—is that what you mean?"

"I mean only that I will tell you when he is to be arrested and shot. Only that."

"And when that time comes, and if you are mistaken, I will press for a court-martial. I am not a man without friends."

"And I am a man without friends," Tennente said, "in your government." He pushed back his garrison cap and looked at Jarel. "You will not arrest without evidence, Colonel. That is rare in the General's country. I like that." He picked up the rifle, raised his hand in a sketchy parody of the General's salute, and left the room.

From the window Jarel watched as Tennente walked painfully to his staff car, across the plaza. There is a man one could follow,

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he thought, and then corrected himself. There is a man one could have followed. Perhaps twenty years ago. Before Jarel's wife had given birth to the two daughters who were now in a convent school at the capital. Before Jarel's body had run to fat and his mind to caution. He looked at a photograph of the General which hung on the opposite wall. Like himself, a plump man. A man who knew how to be safe, how to twist and turn . . .

"You see," Lieutenant Bonares said, "on a clear afternoon like this you can see the frontier post of the Republic clearly, and the people moving there in front of it. We could wave to each other if we wanted to, but we never do."

"No," Tennente said, as he stood beside the young man outside the border hut. "I can see that." He looked upward. "It will snow."

"It often does, up here, although it always remains warm in the town below. Here it is always quiet."

"Myself, I like it."

"I am not your age, sir."

"No. That is so. It will take you many years to learn that life like this can be pleasant, or at least not ugly."

"In the cities," Bonares said, "there it is always pleasant, and promotions come quickly. One could be a colonel at forty, one could—" He caught his tongue and flushed through his olive skin at his bad manners.

"It is all right," Tennente said. "I have been a colonel. And once I was almost a general. When I was young I would not have liked this place. When I was young I was a fool." He walked over to his staff car, and his sergeant handed him a canvas-wrapped bundle. While the two border troopers outside the hut looked at the bundle with idle, bored curiosity, Tennente and the lieutenant went into the hut.

Tennente unwrapped the rifle and placed it on the table near the unwashed coffee cups of the morning.

"You asked if Gomar were smuggling guns," Tennente said. "He *is*. This is one of them. Pick it up. Examine it."

Bonares looked at it with a vague, professional interest and then replaced it.

Tennente slipped into a chair. "You have never seen a gun like it?"

Bonares shook his head.

"No," Tennente said. "That is because you were too young. This model is no longer used in the army, and it is not a good gun, perhaps, because it lost a war."

"Major," Bonares said. "I have told you what I know, and I will help you if I can."

"Yes," Tennente said. His voice was even, but there was a tired edge to it. "I understand that. Per-

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haps I have come up here so that you can tell me what you do not know. The route is clear. You know it, and Jarel knows it, and I know it. But something happens on that route which only Gomar knows."

He reached in his pocket, pulled out the map, and unfolded it on the table, beside the rifle. Then he motioned to the lieutenant to sit beside him. He scratched the stubble on his chin. "I wish that I were the kind of officer your colonel is—all logic and crisp argument. When I was at the Academy I was always poor at that. If I were such an officer I could say, 'Don't you see, my dear Colonel, it was done thus-and-so'—telling him exactly how. But instead I know only that it was done."

Bonares shook his head. "I wish I could tell you."

"The map and the rifle," Tennente said. "Logic and violence. What those two cannot do when they are joined! Together they can make a revolution."

"A trickle of guns will not make a revolution," Bonares said self-consciously. He had been taught that politics are not a soldier's concern.

"In the country which the General rules?" Tennente asked. "There were enough guns in that arms cache for a regiment. A gun will never stay buried, Lieutenant—never."

"He brings no guns to this post, Major. I swear it!"

Tennente ran his hand along the dull barrel of the rifle, and now the voice which spoke to the young officer was more quiet. "Once I wished that there were more of these weapons—in the days before this gun was buried, when the General's artillery was rolling across the plains, when towns which contained not a single soldier were bombed and destroyed. You don't remember those days, Lieutenant. You were a little boy in school."

"I have heard the story."

"How proud we were then of the army of Adesta. The army which buried their arms rather than surrender them." He smiled. "And how pleased we were when the report of the commission made it clear that the arms were out of reach of the General."

"If one feels as you do," Bonares said, "why are you not still proud?"

Tennente looked at Bonares who, frightened by his rudeness, dropped his eyes to the map. "Because I have come to hate violence and those who make use of it. I was proud that those guns could be used again. But not by Gomar." Tennente pushed back his chair and stood up. "Not by Gomar. I am not proud that the guns of my old army should be used to destroy my own country." He leaned forward. "Right in this

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pass, Lieutenant, our country is being betrayed."

"In this pass," Bonares said, his young clear eyes troubled. "I had not thought of it that way."

"And that is why I cannot use the fine logic of your colonel, who shows me circles on maps. Because the one man I hate even more than the General is carrying guns here. And I am going to stop him."

Bonares' hands were pressed so hard against the table that the tips of his fingers were white. "I would help you if I could, Major."

"Though why I should stop this Gomar I do not know," Tennente said. "Nor for whom. For a fat General whose chief virtue is that he is only a little bit better than a totalitarian government? For a fat colonel who is afraid of a bad report? For a lieutenant who wants a pleasant post in the capital?" He walked to the window. "Perhaps I will stop him for the honor of an army whose members are scattered or dead and all betrayed."

It was beginning to snow, and the first flakes were falling slowly and noiselessly. "It must have been snowing that day," he said. "That day fifteen years ago. Over the pass an army moved up and then moved back. An army defeated, and honeycombed by men like Gomar. Now where is your logic, Lieutenant? That quality which Colonel Jarel values so highly. Tell me what you do not know." He glanced momentarily at Bonares, whose eyes were fixed on the map.

"Logic is always helpful," Bonares said sententiously, without raising his eyes. "And ultimately it is always correct."

"Then how does he carry through his guns?" Tennente asked.

"How can I tell you what I do not know?" Bonares said, and then looked up. "I can tell you only that he does not carry guns to this post."

"Yet logic is always correct," Tennente said. "Ultimately." He turned back to the window, and for an instant he saw imprinted on the retina of his imagination the long weary columns of men moving backward, down the long steep road to the General's tribunals and concentration camps, and he felt that if he could sharpen the focus of his vision he would be able to see whether or not they still carried their arms. For Tennente knew that guns will not stay buried, nor violence stay hidden in the earth. He tried to look backward, fifteen years, to the clue which the present did not hold.

The snow was falling more swiftly now, and as it did so, it wiped from Tennente's mind the picture which his tired imagination had conjured up. And in place of that picture was an idea, an implausible, improbable idea. An idea which was against all Jarel's logic, but which was really the only logical answer.

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He turned. "Lieutenant, do you still wish to be of service to me?"

"In anything, Major."

"After you have searched Gomar's truck tonight, phone me. I will be at the hotel."

"Of course," Bonares said.

"I want to time him, to see how long it takes him to reach the town." He walked to the door. "If he comes tonight. It is snowing hard."

"He always comes," Bonares said bitterly.

In the years before the first world war an attempt was made to establish Adesta as a resort town. They built a large hotel at the edge of the town, fronting the valley, a hotel with a fine long marbled terrace from which one could look across the brief valley at the mountains. Here, for a few years, ladies from the capital sat with their parasols, sipping ices while the gentlemen strolled up and down, pretending that Adesta was Biarritz or Sorrento or Zurich. They would drive into Adesta in their open touring cars, swathed in dust-coats and mufflers, and stay for weeks.

In those days the neighboring Republic was a friendly land and there were no frontier guards. The visitors, on windless days, would drive up the narrow twisting road and over the pass for picnics on the green warm meadows and then drive back in the cool evening for dancing on the terrace of the hotel. But the cold winds drove them away and the manager went bankrupt and sold the hotel to a native innkeeper. Now it was visibly decaying.

There were few servants now, and the pink stucco walls were unwashed. The expensive walnut bar had been replaced by one of zinc, about which the wine growers and farmers would gather in the evening, discussing prices and the strange things which happened in the city. One wing of the hotel had been destroyed by artillery fire during the revolution and had not been replaced. The marble of the long terrace, which had once been the pride of its owner, was cracked and dirty now, and the tiny tables were unwashed.

It was late in the evening when Colonel Jarel joined Tennente on the terrace, although the major had been sitting there since twilight. Jarel sank into the tiny wicker chair beside Tennente. "There is a roadblock at the foot of the mountain now. Gomar will be stopped when he reaches it. It is all arranged precisely as you suggested."

Tennente nodded. He was smoking, and the tiny glow of his cigar outlined the long creased face.

"You may be right," Jarel said placatingly. "We will find out. It would be much to our credit if you were right."

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"It does not matter," Tennente said.

"It matters. Of course it matters—if guns are being supplied."

"Here, there, everywhere ... Did you ever have rats in your house, Jarel? You find their hole, plug it up with cement, and sit back. You see no more rats. But they are there, moving delicately behind the woodwork, sounding out the weakness of the wood. They find a section which has been badly joined and they begin to gnaw. And soon there is another hole and you have to plug that one up."

"But you simply keep on plugging up the holes," Jarel said.

"Oh, yes. Unless you build strongly, with good wood."

A wind was beginning to rise, and now it blew gently across the terrace. Jarel, as he watched Tennente's motionless figure, shivered slightly. It is the wind, he thought.

"I can get into a great deal of trouble for what I am doing," Jarel said, "and I have always avoided trouble. But now I am not afraid."

"You will be," Tennente said. "Fear is in this country like malaria in a swamp."

"What are you afraid of?" Jarel asked.

Tennente pointed with his cigar. "There are Gomar's lights," he said. "He is coming to Bonares' hut." *I am afraid of nothing because I am a coward,* he thought; *I am not afraid because I have no hope.*

He drew in on his cigar, and then, to remain calm, he began to talk, while Jarel watched the lights of the truck, crawling like twin, malign insects, toward Bonares. "From the first there has been an impossibility. If the guns were on the Republic side, the guards would have discovered them. If they were on our side, the military commission would have discovered them fifteen years ago."

"Exactly."

"Exactly," Tennente repeated dryly.

"Bonares has stopped the truck," Jarel said. It would be simple, he thought, to phone and have the roadblock removed. He looked nervously at Tennente, remembering what the major had said. *You will be afraid again.*

"And I thought that either the guards have been bribed to pass through the guns or else the commission did not do a good job. But the guards could not have been bribed in that fashion, or they would have been trapped when we made our surprise inspections."

Tennente had been watching the tip of his cigar, but when Jarel said, "He has left Bonares," he looked up and watched the two small headlights move slowly down the mountain.

"And I had the report of the commission. They did not do a haphazard job. Building a hut, moving outward from the hut,

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inch by inch—this is not the method of bunglers."

The wind brushed across Jarel's face like a soft, impalpable leaf. "Bonares should have phoned."

"He will," Tennente said. "He will phone to tell you that Gomar brought no guns to the hut. And between these two facts I ran back and forth like a squirrel. Then, this afternoon, at the border hut, when I realized that Bonares found it impossible to lie, I had an idea which grew to a certainty." He smiled mirthlessly. "You know it is very cold up there, with only the snow and high winds for your companions."

The wind, cutting down the path, swept across the terrace. It whipped up the dead brown leaves which were scattered on the terrace and pushed them against the tables. The wind shook the doors and windows of the decaying hotel. Somewhere inside there was a sound of rotting wood being torn loose.

"I have never known the wind to be so high," Jarel said. "It makes the terrace dangerous."

"The building was not built strongly," Tennente said. "Pink stucco and cheap marble." That is not the way to build—either a hotel or a nation. One built with honor and integrity, solid stone upon solid stone.

They sat in silence as the lights approached the foot of the mountain. Presently Tennente, with a curious savagery, flung his cigar over the marbled rail of the terrace and looked up toward the hut. "Something is wrong up there. Something is wrong."

"No," Jarel said. "Bonares phoned me just before I came here."

Suddenly Tennente sat very still, but he said only, "Why?"

"He asked me to tell you that Gomar would carry no more guns down the mountain."

For a moment only the sound of the wind and the driven leaves filled the terrace, and then Tennente said, "You are sure those were his exact words? No more guns will come down the mountain?"

"Quite sure," Jarel said, puzzled and very frightened.

A waiter came out and summoned Jarel to the phone. When he came back, he was sweating in the cold night air. "You were right, Major. Half of Gomar's casks contained guns, when the border troopers at the roadblock search them."

He looked across at the lights of the stopped car.

"Anything else?" Tennente asked.

"Yes," Jarel said. "The two border troopers rode down with him. The officer in charge of the roadblock has no explanation."

"They were trying to get away," Tennente said quietly. "They had helped Gomar shoot Bonares."

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The two men—the one who understood and the one who did not—sat without speaking, until Jarel could no longer stand being alone with the wind and the gaunt man beside him. "Why?" he asked.

"Because honor is so strange and tenuous a thing," Tennente said. "Because it would allow Lieutenant Bonares to do a terrible thing but would not allow him to lie. Bonares was a good young man, but a naive one, and rather weak. We teach our young officers that they should know nothing of politics. It was so in my time too. Perhaps it is a good thing, perhaps a bad. He would have killed himself rather than be a traitor. But a little gunrunning now, a profitable and a dangerously romantic affair for a poor officer with no chance of promotion. And so he and the guards took Gomar's bribes. But he would not lie.

"When I went up to him today, I showed him a gun, and spoke of what that gun would mean in the possession of a traitor. And then we looked together at the map of the military commission. Slowly, I suppose, we realized together: I where the guns were hidden, and he what he had been doing. I noticed, in passing almost, that he would always answer my questions with a kind of formula: 'Gomar brings no guns to the hut.' Never did he say, 'Gomar will take no guns away from the hut.' So, when I began to suspect this afternoon, I hoped, I prayed, that he would speak, but he did not. Now I know why. He planned to stop Gomar or be killed. His men were not so noble." Tennente shook his head. "It does not matter."

But Jarel said, "Where were the guns?"

"In the only place where the commission did *not* search. Buried deep in the earth *under* the hut—the hut built *before* the commission began to search. The guards were not bribed to pass the guns through, but to give them to Gomar. Each night he would drive to the Republic, pick up some casks of wine, then drive back to the hut, where the arms casks would be carried up from their pit and loaded aboard. Then the floor planks of the hut would be replaced until the next night. Of course, when we came up, Gomar merely drove down with wine." Tennente smiled. "Logical demonstration," he said.

Jarel stood up. "We can't be sure what has happened at the hut. Perhaps they did not kill Bonares. Perhaps they—" But Tennente had closed his eyes.

The colonel stood up and walked across the terrace to the door, and then turned and looked back. Tennente had opened his eyes, but his back was half turned to the decaying hotel. He was looking through the darkness to the mountains.

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EDITORIAL NOTE: *The Cold Winds of Adesta* was first published in 1952. After 17 years (has so little progress been made?) Major Tennente is still the thinking man of today—torn, disillusioned, and susceptible to a destroying cynicism. Nor, after 17 years, has the background changed—the background of a confused and decaying civilization.

But, after 17 years, one other thing has not changed. There is still hope. We said it in 1952 and we say it in 1969, and God willing, we'll say it year after year after year. That is what must be driven home—that while men like Tennente are alive and functioning, there is still hope. The human animal still values the higher code of loyalty—in the larger sense, loyalty to one's self and to one's principles; in the smaller sense, loyalty to discipline.

Thus, Major Tennente still symbolizes the policeman-soldier who, 17 years after, still does not ask Cain's question; he knows without asking that he and all those who are like him are indeed their brothers' keepers . . .

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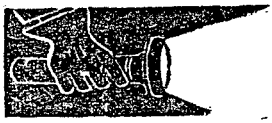

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

And still there need be no griping. Once more, I am happy to report, the fare at table is varied, sustaining, and suited to the palate of any *gourmet.* However, lest this introduction should sound like a television commercial, let's dispense with further preliminaries.

If you have not yet met saturnine Captain Jose Da Silva, the Brazilian police's liaison officer with Interpol, and Da Silva's friend Wilson, that American Embassy dignitary who has proved anything but a stooge in other cases, by all means make their acquaintance with **The Xavier Affair,** by Robert L. Fish (Putnam, $4.50).

Against the well evoked background, Rio and much of the countryside too, young Chico Xavier, whose father is among Brazil's richest men, plans with his friends and his mistress a fake kidnapping in which the ransom shall be a huge and profitable joke on his old man. Then something goes wrong; the whole scheme blows up in a murder which seems as mysterious to Rio's gilded youth as it is to Da Silva and Wilson. Who really strangled the victim, in the middle of so foul a slum? Who stepped in and took the half-million-dollar ransom? And just how does beautiful Romana Vilares figure in all this?

For sixteen chapters, amid colorful characters from the exalted to the low, our author expertly blends detective work with fast action and shock. There is a wild car chase over tortuous mountain roads. There is another strangling, this time in the soft atmosphere of a luxury apartment. The pace roars to a double-twist surprise finale after the problem seems solved; its central clue has been as large (but as deceptive) as life itself. And Mr. Fish has written his best book.

Since the anti-hero of crime fiction is usually a young man with at least some romantic qualities, we come astonished to **The Dance of Death,** by Jeremy Potter (Walker, $4.50), in which the anti-hero is fat, elderly, and bumbling as well as dishonest. Rowlandson Jones, London art dealer, has a fine gallery in Soho, a handsome if shrewish wife, and extra-marital amorous tastes more suited to a man half his age. Nevertheless, despite all this sham respectability, he is so engagingly presented that we can't help sympathizing.

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From the moment he finds the murdered girl in his office, we are on Jones's side throughout his constant tilts against the law, throughout his less than idyllic interlude with Nicolette of Paris, throughout his frantic effort to hide corpses that keep turning up, to the last jangle of nerves when they almost trap him.

Over everything broods the spirit of one dead for so long a time: Thomas Rowlandson, the brilliant caricaturist whose drawings linked eighteenth century to nineteenth, and who is Rowlandson Jones's hero. Living and dead make formidable partners for a first-class murder mystery with antiquarian overtones, in which Rowlandson Jones triumphs even when he has joined his hero among the shades.

A Kiss Before Dying, by Ira Levin (Simon & Schuster, $4.95) is the hardcover reprint of a classic thriller first published more than a decade ago. Fully to explain the book's theme, except that it concerns a vicious youth who makes murder his habit, would be telling too much beforehand. We watch this rake's progress in a kind of frozen fascination. He never gambles but with stacked cards; he never plays but with luck. How long will he get away with it? How long could *anybody* get away with it?

More carefully constructed than the casual approach would indicate, **A Kiss Before Dying** packs its surprise wallop in the middle rather than at the end. The end, suitably violent, becomes an exercise in sheer horror. If you missed it the first time round, don't miss it now.

To conclude with espionage-cum-adventure, Robert Wade's **Knave of Eagles** (Random House, $4.95) will delight those who prefer cloak and dagger of the more sophisticated sort. Gil Rolfe, television executive, must slip under wraps into Castro's Cuba and smuggle out the ballplayer who alone can pitch his team to a World Series victory.

Gil's lifelong motto, "Thou shalt not care a damn for anything," remains unshaken by knives or bullets or doubledealing in the Havana of the Bearded One. It is only hardened by the grotesque situation he must resolve: the ballplayer has a girl, the girl has a family, and nobody will leave without everybody else. Also, though Ester of the Underground means much to our amateur secret agent, does she mean enough to upset his detachment? We are past the bitterly ironic explanation of someone's counter-Castro plot before Gil discovers he can just possibly care a damn for something after all, and we have been treated to some triumphant storytelling along the way.

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a NEW Black Mask detective story

Meet Michael Collins' one-armed private eye, Dan Fortune. Perhaps you have already met Dan Fortune in the novel titled ACT OF FEAR *which won the Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" for the Best First Mystery Novel published in 1967. The second novel about Dan Fortune was* THE BRASS RAINBOW, *published early in 1969.*

Here is (so far as we know) the first Dan Fortune short—a rara avis of a story that is not only semi-hardboiled and reminiscent of "Black Mask," but involves a private eye in an unlikely private-eye situation—a genuine, 24-carat, dyed-in-the-blood locked room. But there is no principle of 'tec technique that prohibits a blending of intellectual pursuit and procedural investigation . . .

NO ONE LIKES TO BE PLAYED FOR A SUCKER

by MICHAEL COLLINS

IT CAN BE A MISTAKE TO BE TOO smart. Deviousness takes real practise, judgment of human nature as fine as a hair, and something else—call it ice. The ice a man has inside him.

Old Tercio Osso came to me with his suspicions on a Thursday morning. That alone showed his uneasiness. Old Tercio hadn't been out of his Carmine Street office in the morning for 20 years—not even for a relative's funeral.

"Business don't come and find you," Tercio pronounced regularly.

Osso & Vitanza, Jewelry, Religious Supplies and Real Estate, and if you wanted to do business with Tercio, or pay your rent, you went to his office in the morning. In the afternoon Tercio presided in his corner at The Mazzini Political Club—a little cards, a little *bocci* out back.

Lean old Cology Vitanza, Ter-

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cio's partner of thirty years, reversed the procedure, and at night they both held down the office—thieves struck at night on Carmine Street, and there was safety in numbers.

It was Cology Vitanza that old Tercio came to me about.

"We got troubles, Mr. Fortune. I think Cology makes plans."

The old man sat like a solemn frog on my one extra chair. He wore his usual ancient black suit, white shirt, and black tie with its shiny knot so small it looked as if it had been tied under pressure. The shabbiness of my one-room office did not bother Tercio. On Carmine Street, no matter how much cash a businessman has in various banks, he knows the value of a shabby front: it gives the poor confidence that a man is like them.

"What kind of plans?"

Tercio shrugged. "Business it's not good. We make some big mistakes. The stock market, buildings not worth so much as we pay, inventory that don't sell."

"I didn't know you made mistakes, Mr. Osso."

"So?" Tercio said. "Maybe I'm old. Vitanza he's old. We lose the touch, the neighborhood it's change. The new people don't buy what we got. Maybe we been playin' too much *bocci,* sit around tellin' too many stories from the old days."

"All right," I said. "What plans do you figure Vitanza makes?"

Tercio folded his plump hands in his broad lap. "For six years Cology got no wife. He got ten kids what got lotsa kids of their own. We both gettin' old. We got insurance, big. We talk about what we do next year and after and we don't think the same, so? Then I see Cology talking to people."

"What kind of insurance have you got?"

"On the inventory, on both of us, for the partners."

I sat back in the gray light from my one air-shaft window. "You're saying you think Vitanza is making plans to collect on the insurance?"

"I see him talk to Sid Nelson yesterday. Three days ago he drinks coffee alone with Don Primo."

Don Primo Veronese was a lawyer, a member of the Mazzini Club, and, by strong rumor, a fence for small hoods. Sid Nelson was a hood, not small but not big—sort of in between. A thief, a killer, and a careful operator.

"You and Vitanza talk to a lot of people."

"Sure, I talk to Don Primo myself," Tercio agreed. "I don't talk to no Sid Nelson. I don't say we should make a special inventory. I don't take big money from the bank, put in envelope, carry in my pocket. I don't go to Mass five times in one week."

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Osso?"

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A slow shrug. "In winter the wolf comes into the streets of the city. The old lion got to learn new tricks or starve. Maybe I'm crazy, okay. Only you watch Cology. You be a detective."

"That's my work," I said. "All right, a hundred in advance."

"A horse works on hay," Tercio said, and counted out two nice crisp fifties. "You tell me nine o'clock every night."

After old Tercio had gone I rubbed at the stump of my missing arm, then phoned Lieutenant Marx at the precinct. I told him Tercio's story.

"What do you want me to do?" Marx said.

"I don't know," I said. "Tell me that Tercio Osso is a smart old man."

"Tercio is a smart old man," Marx said. "All I can do is stand by, Dan. At least until you get something that can be called reasonable suspicion."

"I know," I said.

"You can check out most of it," Marx pointed out.

That's what I did. I checked out Osso's story.

It checked. Other people had seen Cology Vitanza talking to Don Primo, and, especially, to Sid Nelson. The firm of Osso & Vitanza was in trouble—cash tied up, notes overdue, interest not paid, a few bad deals the other Carmine Street financiers were grinning about, and the jewelry stock not moving at all.

Vitanza had been going to Mass almost every day. He had withdrawn $5,000 in cash. (A teller I knew, and ten bucks, got me that information.) I had to take Tercio Osso's word about the special inventory of the unmoving stock, but I was sure it would turn out true.

I began tailing Cology Vitanza. It wasn't a hard tail. The tall old man was easy to follow and a man of routine. He never took me out of the ten-square-block area of Little Italy. I reported to Osso every night at nine o'clock by telephone.

On Friday I spotted Vitanza talking again to Sid Nelson. The hoodlum seemed interested in what Vitanza had to say.

I ate a lot of spaghetti and drank a lot of wine for two days. I saw one bad movie, and visited the homes of twenty old men. That is, Vitanza visited and I lurked outside in the cold getting more bored every minute. I wore out my knees kneeling at the back of a dim church.

But I was in The Capri Tavern at six o'clock Saturday night when Vitanza stopped to talk to a seedy-looking character in a rear booth. A white envelope passed from Vitanza to the seedy type. I waited until the new man downed his glass of wine and ambled out. Then I switched to tailing him.

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I followed the seedy man through Little Italy and across to the East Side. He looked around a lot, and did all kinds of twists and turns, as if he figured he might be followed. That made it hard work, but I kept up with him. He finally headed for the Bowery.

A block south of Houston he suddenly ducked into a wino joint. I sprinted and went in, but he was out the back way and gone. I went around through the alleys and streets of the Bowery for another hour trying to pick up his trail, but I had no luck.

I went back to Carmine Street to find Cology Vitanza. He wasn't at The Mazzini Club, and neither was Osso. I tried their other haunts and didn't find them. The lights were on behind the curtained windows of the shop and office on Carmine Street, but I couldn't go in without tipping my hand, so I took up a stakeout.

Nothing happened for half an hour. Then some people tried to get into the store, but the front door was locked. That wasn't right for a Saturday night. It was almost nine o'clock by then. I made my call to Osso from a booth where I could watch the front door of the store. There was no answer, so I called Lieutenant Marx.

"I don't like how it sounds," Marx said "Too bad you lost that Bowery character. I've done some checking on their insurance. They've got $50,000 on the inventory, $25,000 life on each payable to the other, and $50,000 surviving-partner insurance with option to buy out the heirs."

"A nice haul," I said. "What do we do?"

"Sid Nelson hasn't moved. I put a man on him for you."

"The Commissioner wouldn't like that."

"The Commissioner won't know," Marx said, and then was silent a few seconds. "We've got no cause to bust in yet."

"And if nothing's wrong we tip off Vitanza."

"But they shouldn't be locked up on Saturday night," Marx said. "The patrolman on the beat ought to be suspicious."

"I guess he ought to," I said.

"I'll be right over," Marx said.

Marx arrived with two of his squad inside three minutes. He'd picked up the beat patrolman on the way. I joined them at the door to the store. We couldn't see anything through the curtains.

"Pound the door and give a call," Marx instructed the beat patrolman.

The patrolman pounded and called out. Nothing happened. Marx chewed his lip and looked at me. Then, as if from far off, we heard a voice. It was from somewhere inside the store, and it was calling for help.

"I guess we go in," Marx said.

He kicked in the glass of the

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door and reached inside for the lock.

At first we saw nothing wrong in the jewelry store. Then Marx pointed to the showcases where the expensive jewelry was kept. They were unlocked and empty.

In the office in the back a rear window was open. A man lay on the floor in a pool of not-quite-dry blood. A .38 caliber automatic was on the floor about five feet from the body, toward the right wall of the office. There was a solid door in the right wall, and behind it someone was knocking and calling, "What's happen out there? Hey, who's out there?"

Marx and I looked at each other as one of his men bent over the body on the floor. It was not Tercio Osso, it was Cology Vitanza. Marx's second man swung the door of the safe open. It had been closed but not locked. It was empty.

Marx went to the solid door. "Who's in there?"

"Osso! He knock me out, lock me in. What's happen?"

Marx studied the door. There was no key in the lock. I went and searched the dead man. I shook my head at Marx—no key. One of Marx's men pointed to the floor.

"There."

The key was on the floor not far from the gun. I picked it up. It was one of those common old house keys, rough and rusted, and there would be no prints. Marx took the key and opened the door.

Tercio Osso blinked at us. "Mr. Fortune, Lieutenant. Where's Cology, he—"

Osso stepped out into the office and saw his dead partner. He just stood and stared. Nothing happened to his face. I watched him. If anything had shown on his face I would have been surprised. Everyone knew he was a tough old man.

"So," he said, nodding, "he kill Cology. It figure. The crazy old man! Crazy!"

"You want to tell us what happened?" Marx said.

"Sure, sure," the old man said. He walked to his desk and sat down heavily. I saw a trickle of blood over his left ear. He looked at Vitanza's body. "He come in maybe hour, two hours ago. What time is it?"

"Nine twenty," Marx said.

"That long?" Osso said. "So two hours since. Seven thirty, maybe. One guy. He comes in the front. I go out to see. He got a mask and a gun. He push me back to office, me and Cology. He makes us go lock the front door, clean out the cases and then the safe. He work fast. He shove me in storeroom, knock me out."

The old man touched his head, winced. "I come to I don't know what time. I listen. Nothing, no noise. I listen long time, I don't

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want him to come back for me. Nothing happen. I hear phone ring. So I start yelling. Then I hear you bust in."

Osso looked around. "He got it all, huh? Out the window. Only he don't keep the deal, no. Cology a crazy man. A guy like that don't keep no deals."

There was a long silence in the office. Sirens were growing in the cold night air outside as the police were arriving at Marx's summons. Marx was chewing his lip and looking at me. I looked at Osso.

"You're telling us you figure Vitanza hired a guy to rob the store for the insurance, and then the guy killed him? Why?"

Osso shrugged. "Who know? Maybe the guy don't want to split with Cology. Maybe the guy figures the jewels are worth more than a cut of the insurance. They fight, Cology's dead. How do I know, I'm locked inside the storeroom."

The Assistant Medical Examiner arrived, the fingerprint team, and two men from Safe and Loft. I went into the storeroom. It was small and windowless. There was no other door. The walls were white and clean, and the room was piled with lumber, cans, tools, and assorted junk. I found a small stain of blood on the floor near the door. The walls seemed solid.

When I went back out Marx's men had finished marking the locations of the body, the gun, and the key. The M.E. stood up and motioned to his men to bring their basket.

"Shot twice in the back," the M.E. said. "Two hours ago, maybe more, maybe a little less. Rigor is just starting. He's a skinny old man. Died pretty quick, I'd say. The slugs are still in him—.38 caliber looks about right."

"The gun's been fired twice," one of Marx's men said, "not long ago."

"Prints all over the place, all kinds," the fingerprint man said. "It won't be easy to lift them clean."

Marx growled, "Prints won't help. What about you Safe and Loft guys?'

A Safe and Loft man said, "Rear window opened from inside. Some marks on the sill could have been a man climbing out. The yard is all concrete, no traces, but we found this."

The Safe and Loft man held up a child's rubber Halloween mask. Marx looked at it sourly.

"They all use that trick now. The movies and TV tell 'em how," Marx said, and came over to me. He lit a cigarette. "Well, Dan?"

"Everything fits," I said. "Just about what I was supposed to figure that Vitanza was planning—except for his killing."

"Neat," Marx said.

"Too neat," I said. "Let's talk to Osso."

While his men and the experts

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went on working, Marx took Osso into the storeroom. I went with them. The old man watched us with cold, black eyes.

"This is just what you expected when you went to Fortune," Marx said to the old man.

"I got a hunch," Osso said.

"What does Cology figure on getting out of it, Tercio?" I said. "The insurance on the stock, no more. Maybe he figures on keeping most of the jewels, too, okay. But figure what you get out of it. You get the whole works—stock insurance, life insurance on Cology, partnership insurance, option to buy it all."

"So?" Osso said, watching me.

"So if Cology was going to set up a risky deal like this it ought to be you who's dead, not him. The thief should have killed you and knocked Cology out. Then there's a big pie to split with Cology."

"You think I set this up?"

I nodded. "It smells, Tercio. We're supposed to figure that Vitanza hired a punk to fake a hold-up, but not kill you when there was more riding on you than on the stock? Then the hired hood kills Cology for some reason and leaves his gun here on the floor? Leaves his mask out in the yard to prove he was here? Leaves the key on the floor so we know you were locked in?"

Osso shrugged. "You figure I set it up, take me down and book me. I call my lawyer. You find the guy I hire. You do that. I tell the truth. I hire no one, you won't find no one. I'm inside the storeroom, so how I kill Cology?"

Marx said, "It's too neat, Osso. You practically told Fortune how it was going to happen."

"So book me. I get my lawyer. You find the man I hire." And the old man smiled. "Or maybe you figure I kill from inside a locked room?"

Marx snapped, "Take the old man down, book him on suspicion. Go over the place with a vacuum cleaner. Send anything you find to Technical Services."

They took Osso. Marx followed and I left with him.

The police had gone, except for a patrolman posted at the broken door in front, when I jimmied the back window and went in. I dropped into the dark office and flicked on my flashlight. I focused the beam on the marks that showed where the gun, the key, and the body had been.

I heard the steps too late. The lights went on, and I turned from pure reflex. I never carry a gun, and if I'd had a gun I couldn't have pulled it with my flash still in my lone hand. I was glad I didn't have a gun. I might have shot by reflex, and it was Lieutenant Marx in the doorway. That's the trouble with a gun, you tend to depend on it if you have one.

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I said, "You, too, Lieutenant?"

"What's your idea?"

"The old man seemed too confident," I said. "He just about begged you to book him on suspicion of having hired a man to fake the robbery and kill Vitanza."

"Yeah," Marx said, "he did. You think he didn't hire anyone?"

I nodded. I didn't like it, but unless Cology Vitanza had set it up after all, which I didn't believe, there had to be another answer. Marx didn't like it either.

"You know what that gives us," Marx said.

"I know," I said, "but Tercio's too smart to hire a killing and have a monkey on his back the rest of his life. No, he'd do it himself."

"You got more than a hunch, Dan?"

"The gun," I said. "It's the flaw in the setup. It sticks out. A thief who kills takes his gun away with him. Osso would know that."

"So?"

"So the gun's being in the office has to be the clue to the answer," I said. "It was here because Osso couldn't do anything else with it. The jewels are gone, the mask was out in the yard, the front door was locked on the inside out in the shop. If Osso had had a choice he'd have taken the gun away and the key too. He didn't. Why?"

Marx rubbed his jaw. "So if he did it, it reads like this: he took the ice and stashed it; he planted the mask and left the rear window open; he killed Vitanza; and then he got into that storeroom, somehow got locked in with the key outside and a long way from the door."

"Yes and no," I said. "If he killed Vitanza *before* he got into that room, he could have disposed of the gun to make it look more like an outside killer. He didn't. So, somehow, he must have killed Vitanza from *inside* the locked storeroom."

"And then got the gun and key out?"

"That's it," I said.

Marx nodded. "Let's find it."

We went to work. The locked room is an exercise in illusion—a magician's trick. Otherwise it's impossible, and the impossible can't be done, period. Since it *had* been done, it must be a trick, a matter of distracting attention, and once you know what you're really looking for, the answer is never hard.

When we had dismissed the distraction—the hired-robber-and-killer theory—the rest was just a matter of logic. I sighted along the line from the body to the seemingly solid wall. The line pointed directly to a light fixture set in the wall. Sighting the other way, the line led to Vitanza's desk and telephone.

"Vitanza came in," I said. "Osso was already inside the locked room. Vitanza went to his desk.

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He probably always did that, and Osso could count on it. Or maybe he saw that the jewels were gone and went to his desk to telephone the police. Osso probably knew he would be sure to do that, too. They'd been partners thirty years."

"And Osso shot him in the back," Marx said. "That's why the shots were in the back, the desk faces the other way."

"Let's look at that light fixture," I said.

It was one of those small modern wall-lamps with a wide circular metal base. It had been attached to the wall recently and was not painted over. The wall behind it sounded hollow, but we could not move the lamp.

"It doesn't come off, Dan," Marx said.

"Not from this side," I said.

We went into the storeroom. I measured off from the door to exactly where the light fixture was attached on the other side of the wall. We studied the wall. The whole wall had been recently painted. The cans of quick-drying paint were among the litter in the storeroom. On the floor there were a few crumbs of dried plaster.

"Quick-drying plaster," I said to Marx.

Marx found a hammer and chisel in the storeroom. There were flecks of plaster on the chisel. He opened a hole directly behind the light fixture—it opened easily. The back of the light fixture was clearly visible about two inches in, between vertical two-by-fours. The fixture had a metal eye on the back. It was held in place by a metal bar that passed through the eye and was angled to catch the two-by-fours.

"That's it," I said. "Simple and clever."

Marx had two hands. He reached in with his left, turned the metal bar, and held the fixture. He pushed the fixture out and to the left and aimed his pistol through the hole with his right hand. He had a shot at the desk five feet away—in direct line with where the body of Cology Vitanza had fallen.

I said, "He had this hole open on this side. He heard Vitanza come in and head for the desk. He pushed out the fixture. It didn't matter if Vitanza heard or not—Osso was ready to shoot.

"He shot Vitanza, tossed the gun and key through the hole, pulled the fixture back and refastened it, plastered up the hole, and painted it. He knew no one would break in until after I called at nine o'clock. He hid here and waited.

"If we believed that Vitanza had set it up, fine, we'd be looking for a non-existent thief and killer. If we think Osso hired a man, fine, too. We're still looking for a non-existent thief and killer, and in a few weeks Osso cleans up this storeroom, and the new plaster sets so it can't be told from

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the old plaster. Maybe he fixes the light fixture so it's permanent in the wall. All the evidence is gone, and he's in the clear."

"Only now the lab boys should be able to prove some of the plaster is newer," Marx said, "the fixture moves out, and the evidence is in this room. We've got him!"

Marx called in Captain Gazzo of Homicide, and Chief of Detectives McGuire. They looked and listened, and McGuire got a judge to order the office and storeroom sealed. The D.A. would want the jury to see the office and storeroom just as they were when Vitanza was killed.

I gave my statement, Marx made his report, and Gazzo faced the old man with it. Osso was a tough old bird.

"I want my lawyer," Osso said.

He got his lawyer, they booked him, and I went home to bed. I felt good. I don't get many locked rooms to play with, so I was pleased with myself.

Until morning.

"It's not the gun," Captain Gazzo said.

I was in Gazzo's office. So was Marx. Gazzo held the .38 automatic that had been on the office floor—the gun that had been the tipoff, the weak link, the key to it all.

"This gun didn't kill Vitanza," Gazzo said. "Ballistics just reported. Vitanza was killed with a .38, but not this one."

I said nothing. Neither did Marx.

"A locked room," Gazzo said sarcastically. "Clever, very clever."

I said it at the start: it can be a mistake to be too smart. A locked-room murder is an illusionist's trick, a matter of the misdirection of attention. And the one who had been too smart was me.

"All he threw out was the key," I said. "That was all he had to throw out all along. The rest was to distract us."

There had never been any reason why Osso had to kill from inside the storeroom, only that he lock himself in from the inside and get the key out. The whole locked room had been just a trick to distract us. A gun on the floor by a dead man; the right caliber and fired recently and the right number of times. Who would dream it was the wrong gun?

"The key," Gazzo said. "First he's brought in on suspicion of having hired a man to fake a robbery and kill his partner. Next he's booked for having killed his partner from inside a locked room with a trick scheme. Now he killed his partner outside the room, switched guns, locked himself in, and just tossed the key out. What next?"

"He killed Vitanza," Marx said. "I'm sure he did."

"I'm sure too," Gazzo agreed, "but what jury will believe us now

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with the speech his lawyer'll make about dumb cops and police persecution? You guys like fairy tales? How do you like the one about the man who cried wolf? The D.A. is bawling on his desk thinking about facing a jury against Osso now."

"We'll find out what he did," Marx said. "We'll find the right gun and the jewels."

"Sure we will," Gazzo said. "Some day."

"And I bet it won't do us any good," I said.

It didn't. Three days after the killing the superintendent of a cheap rooming house on the Lower East Side reported that a tenant hadn't come out of his room for three days. The police broke in and found the man dead. It was the seedy character I had followed and lost.

He had been shot in the shoulder. The bullet was still in the wound. But that was not what had killed him. He had died from drinking methyl alcohol with a lot of lye in it. The bottle was in the room. The police found some of the missing jewels in the room, but not all. They also found a .38 caliber automatic that had been fired twice.

"It's the gun that killed Vitanza," ballistics reported.

"Only the bum's prints on the gun," fingerprinting said.

"It's certain he died four or five hours *after* Vitanza died," the M.E. said. "The bad whiskey killed him. He might have been unconscious most of the time, but after three days we'll never prove it. He lost blood from that shoulder wound."

Ballistics then added the final touch. "The bullet in the bum's shoulder came from the gun you found on the floor of Osso & Vitanza's office. The gun was registered to Cology Vitanza himself."

With my statement and report on what I had observed Cology Vitanza do, on the actions Osso had reported and I had checked out, the evidence logically added up to only one story: the seedy character had been hired by Cology Vitanza to rob the jewelry store. For some reason there had been a fight while Osso was unconscious in the locked room. (Osso stated he had plastered the hole in the storeroom the day before; with the evidence against the bum his story was better than Marx's and mine.)

Vitanza had wounded the bum, and the bum had killed Vitanza. Then the wounded bum had run for his room carrying the loot, hiding some of it. In his room, weak from his wound, he had drunk the bad whiskey, passed out, and died. It was just the way a wounded bum would die.

I had a different story. The day after they dropped all charges against Tercio Osso I went to his office. He didn't try to evade me.

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"I owe you a couple days and expenses," Osso said.

"You hired me in the first place just to make me and Marx suspicious," I said. "You figured I'd talk to the police and you knew we'd suspect a trick. You wanted us to accuse you right away of hiring someone to kill Vitanza."

Osso said nothing.

"You arranged all those suspicious acts of Vitanza's. It wouldn't be hard. You were partners, old friends, and he'd do anything you asked him to do if you said it was business. You asked him to talk to Sid Nelson about something innocent, to take out $5,000 in cash for you, to meet the bum with a note, even to go to a lot of Masses."

The old man was like a fat black frog in the chair.

"You played us like trout. It was too easy and not smart for you to have hired a killer. We were sure to look for more. That's when you handed us the locked room and the gun on the floor."

Osso smiled.

"That gun would have made any cop wonder, and you expected us to figure out the locked-room trick. You wanted us to charge you with it, and you wanted time. You needed at least a few hours to be sure the bum was dead, and the locked room would keep us nice and busy for at least a few hours."

The old man began to light a thin black cigar.

"You killed Vitanza while I was tailing the bum. You took the jewels, locked up, went out the back window. You went to the bum's room and filled him with the bad whiskey, then shot him with Vitanza's gun. A wound that would bleed but not kill.

"Then you planted the gun that had killed Vitanza in the bum's room with some of the jewels. You knew no one would look for the bum for days. You went back to the office and laid out Vitanza. You put the gun that had shot the bum on the office floor. You locked yourself in the storeroom from the inside and tossed out the key through the light-fixture hole in the wall.

"Then you sat back and led me and Marx into being too smart for our own good. You got the time you needed. You kept us away from the bum until it was too late. You've got what you were after, and you're safe." I stopped and looked at the old man. "One thing I want to know, Osso. Why did you pick me?"

Tercio Osso blew smoke and looked solemn. He shrugged. He took the black stogie from his mouth and studied it. Then he laughed loudly.

"You got one arm," Osso said, grinning at me. "You're easy to spot. I got to know where you are all the time to make it work, see? I got to make it easy for that bum to spot you and lead

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you a chase before he loses you. And I got to make it easy for the man watching you all the time."

"You had a man watching me?"

"Sure, what else? Good man, a relative, never talk." Osso studied his cigar some more. "You got good friends on the cops, and you're a real smart man, see? I mean, I know you figure out that locked room."

And Osso laughed again. He was very pleased with his shenanigans. I said nothing, just stared at him. He studied me.

"I got to do it, see?" Osso said at last. "I'm in trouble. Vitanza he don't agree with me no more. He was gonna ruin me if I don't stop him. So I stop him. And I fix it so you smart guys outsmart yourselves."

I stood up. "That's okay, Osso. You see, you made the same mistake Marx and I made."

"So?" he said, his black eyes narrowing.

"That's right. You forgot other people can be as smart as you. You fixed it good so that no one can prove in court what you did, but everyone knows you did it. You made it too complicated, Osso. You're the only one who could have worked it all. What I figured out, and just told you, I also told Vitanza's ten kids, and the members of the Mazzini Club. They're smart, too."

"I kill you too!" Osso croaked.

"You couldn't get away with it twice, not with everyone knowing what you did. You're too smart to try. Bad odds, and you always play the odds."

I left him chewing his lip, his shrewd mind working fast. Who knows, he's a smart man, and maybe he'll still get away with it. But I doubt it. As I said, other men are smart, too, and Vitanza's kids and The Mazzini Club boys believed the story I had figured out.

I read the newspapers carefully now. I'm waiting for a small item about an old man named Tercio Osso being hit by a truck, or found in the river drowned by accident, or maybe the victim of an unfortunate food poisoning in a restaurant that just happens to be run by a member of The Mazzini Club.

Nothing fancy or complicated this time, just a simple, everyday accident. Of course, everyone will know what really happened, but no one will ever prove it. Whoever gets Tercio Osso won't even have to be particularly careful. A reasonably believable accident will do the trick.

After all, we're all human and have a sense of justice, and no one likes to be played for a sucker.

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FIRST PRIZE WINNER NUMBER 6

Charlotte Armstrong's First Prize Winner of 1950—possibly the best and most important short story she has ever written—is more than a detective story: it is a detective story *plus*. The story's lesson (or to use a more shunned word, "message") is, unfortunately, as desperately needed today as it was eighteen years ago when the story was first published. This message—let's not avoid the word—is far more significant than merely "who did it," or "how was it done," or even "why was it done." For Charlotte Armstrong's story reveals the meaning, the purpose, and the goodness of Truth (yes, the old-fashioned word spelled with a capital), and conversely, the menace, the peril, and the godlessness of Truth's enemy. You will not forget this story for a long time . . .

THE ENEMY

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

THEY SAT AT THE LUNCH TABLE and afterward moved through the dim, cool, high-ceilinged rooms to the Judge's library where, in their quiet talk, the old man's past and the young man's future seemed to telescope and touch. But at twenty minutes after three, on that hot, bright June Saturday afternoon, the present tense erupted. Out in the quiet street arose the sound of trouble.

Judge Kittinger adjusted his pince-nez, rose, and led the way to his old-fashioned veranda from which they could overlook the tree-roofed intersection of Greenwood Lane and Hannibal Street. Near the steps to the corner house, opposite, there was a surging knot of children and one man. Now, from the house on the Judge's left, a woman in a blue house dress ran diagonally toward the excitement. And a police car slipped up Hannibal Street, gliding to the curb. One tall officer plunged into the group and threw restraining arms around a screaming boy.

Mike Russell, saying to his host, "Excuse me, sir," went rapidly across the street. Trouble's center was the boy, ten or eleven years old, a towheaded boy, with tawny-

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lashed blue eyes, a straight nose, a fine brow. He was beside himself, writhing in the policeman's grasp. The woman in the blue dress was yammering at him. "Freddy! Freddy! Freddy!" Her voice simply did not reach his ears.

"You ole stinker! You rotten ole stinker! You ole nut!" All the boy's heart was in the epithets.

"Now, listen . . ." The cop shook the boy who, helpless in those powerful hands, yet blazed. His fury had stung to crimson the face of the grown man at whom it was directed.

This man, who stood with his back to the house as one besieged, was plump, half-bald, with eyes much magnified by glasses. "Attacked me!" he cried in a high whine. "Rang my bell and absolutely leaped on me!"

Out of the seven or eight small boys clustered around them came overlapping fragments of shrill sentences. It was clear only that they opposed the man. A small woman in a print dress, a man in shorts, whose bare chest was winter-white, stood a little apart, hesitant and distressed. Up on the veranda of the house the screen door was half open, and a woman seated in a wheel chair peered forth anxiously.

On the green grass, in the shade, perhaps thirty feet away, there lay in death a small brown-and-white dog.

The Judge's luncheon guest observed all this. When the Judge drew near, there was a lessening of the noise. Judge Kittinger said, "This is Freddy Titus, isn't it? Mr. Matlin? What's happened?"

The man's head jerked. "I," he said, "did nothing to the dog. Why would I trouble to hurt the boy's dog? I try—you know this, Judge—I try to live in peace here. But these kids are terrors! They've made this block a perfect hell for me and my family." The man's voice shook. "My wife, who is not strong . . . My stepdaughter, who is a cripple . . . These kids are no better than a slum gang. They are vicious! That boy rang my bell and *attacked* . . .! I'll have him up for assault! I . . ."

The Judge's face was old ivory and he was aloof behind it.

On the porch a girl pushed past the woman in the wheel chair, a girl who walked with a lurching gait.

Mike Russell asked quietly, "Why do the boys say it was you, Mr. Matlin, who hurt the dog?"

The kids chorused. "He's an ole mean . . ." "He's a nut . . ." "Just because . . ." "Took Clive's bat and . . ." ". . . chases us . . ." "Tries to put everything on us . . ." "Told my mother lies . . ." "Just because . . ."

He is our enemy, they were saying; *he is our enemy.*

"They . . ." began Matlin, his throat thick with anger.

"Hold it a minute." The second cop, the thin one, walked toward

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where the dog was lying.

"Somebody," said Mike Russell in a low voice, "must do something for the boy."

The Judge looked down at the frantic child. He said gently, "I am as sorry as I can be, Freddy..." But in his old heart there was too much known, and too many little dogs he remembered that had already died, and even if he were as sorry as he could be, he couldn't be sorry enough. The boy's eyes turned, rejected, returned. To the enemy.

Russell moved near the woman in blue, who pertained to this boy somehow. "His mother?"

"His folks are away. I'm there to take care of him," she snapped, as if she felt herself put upon by a crisis she had not contracted to face.

"Can they be reached?"

"No," she said decisively.

The young man put his stranger's hand on the boy's rigid little shoulder. But he too was rejected. Freddy's eyes, brilliant with hatred, clung to the enemy. Hatred doesn't cry.

"Listen," said the tall cop, "if you could hang onto him for a minute—"

"Not I," said Russell.

The thin cop came back. "Looks like the dog got poison. When was he found?"

"Just now," the kids said.

"Where? There?"

"Up Hannibal Street. Right on the edge of ole Matlin's back lot."

"Edge of *my* lot!" Matlin's color freshened again. "On the sidewalk, why don't you say? Why don't you tell the truth?"

"We are! *We* don't tell lies!"

"Quiet, you guys," the cop said. "Pipe down, now."

"Heaven's my witness, I wasn't even here!" cried Matlin. "I played nine holes of golf today. I didn't get home until... May?" he called over his shoulder. "What time did I come in?"

The girl on the porch came slowly down, moving awkwardly on her uneven legs. She was in her twenties, no child. Nor was she a woman. She said in a blurting manner, "About three o'clock, Daddy Earl. But the dog was dead."

"What's that, Miss?"

"This is my stepdaughter—"

"The dog was dead," the girl said, "before he came home. I saw it from upstairs, before three o'clock. Lying by the sidewalk."

"You drove in from Hannibal Street, Mr. Matlin? Looks like you'd have seen the dog."

Matlin said with nervous thoughtfulness, "I don't know. My mind... Yes, I..."

"He's telling a lie!"

"Freddy!"

"Listen to that," said May Matlin, "will you?"

"She's a liar, too!"

The cop shook Freddy. Mr. Matlin made a sound of helpless ex-

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asperation. He said to the girl, "Go keep your mother inside, May." He raised his arm as if to wave. "It's all right, honey," he called to the woman in the chair, with a false cheeriness that grated on the ear. "There's nothing to worry about, now."

Freddy's jaw shifted and young Russell's watching eyes winced. The girl began to lurch back to the house.

"It was my wife who put in the call," Matlin said. "After all, they were on me like a pack of wolves. Now, I . . . I *understand* that the boy's upset. But all the same, he cannot . . . He must learn . . . I will not have . . . I have enough to contend with, without this malice, this unwarranted antagonism, this persecution."

Freddy's eyes were unwinking.

"It has got to stop!" said Matlin almost hysterically.

"Yes," murmured Mike Russell, "I should think so," Judge Kittinger's white head, nodding, agreed.

"We've heard about quite a few dog-poisoning cases over the line in Redfern," said the thin cop with professional calm. "None here."

The man in the shorts hitched them up, looking shocked. "Who'd do a thing like that?"

A boy said boldly, "Ole Matlin would." He had an underslung jaw and wore spectacles on his snub nose. "I'm Phil Bourchard," he said to the cop. He had courage.

"We just know," said another. "I'm Ernie Allen." Partisanship radiated from his whole thin body. "Ole Matlin doesn't want anybody on his ole property."

"Sure." "He doesn't want anybody on his ole property." "It was ole Matlin; all right."

"It was. It was," said Freddy Titus.

"Freddy," said the housekeeper in blue, "now you better be still. I'll tell your Dad." It was a meaningless fumble for control. The boy didn't even hear her.

Judge Kittinger tried, patiently. "You can't accuse without cause, Freddy."

"Bones didn't hurt his ole property. Bones wouldn't hurt anything. Ole Matlin did it."

"You lying little devil!"

"*He's* a liar!"

The cop gave Freddy another shake. "You kids found him, eh?"

"We were up at Bourchard's and were going down to the Titus house."

"And he was dead," said Freddy.

"*I* know nothing about it," said Matlin icily. "Nothing at all."

The cop, standing between, said wearily, "Any of you people see what coulda happened?"

"I was sitting in my back yard," said the man in shorts. "I'm Daugherty, next door, up Hannibal Street. Didn't see a thing."

The small woman in a print dress spoke up. "I am Mrs. Page. I live across on the corner, officer.

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I believe I did see a strange man go into Mr. Matlin's driveway this morning."

"When was this, Ma'am?"

"About eleven o'clock. He was poorly dressed. He walked up the drive and around the garage."

"Didn't go to the house?"

"No. He was only there a minute. I believe he was carrying something. He was rather furtive. And very poorly dressed, almost like a tramp."

There was a certain relaxing, among the elders. "Ah, the tramp," said Mike Russell. "The good old reliable tramp. Are you sure, Mrs. Page? It's very unlikely that—"

But she bristled. "Do you think I'm lying?"

Russell's lips parted, but he felt the Judge's hand on his arm. "This is my guest, Mr. Russell . . . Freddy." The Judge's voice was gentle. "Let him go, officer. I'm sure he understands, now. Mr. Matlin was not even at home, Freddy. It's possible that this . . . er . . . stranger . . . Or it may have been an accident."

"Wasn't a tramp. Wasn't an accident."

"You can't *know* that, boy," said the Judge, somewhat sharply. Freddy said nothing. As the officer slowly released his grasp, the boy took a free step, backward, and the other boys surged to surround him. There stood the enemy, the monster who killed and lied, and the grownups with their reasonable doubts were on the monster's side. But the boys knew what Freddy knew. They stood together.

"Somebody," murmured the Judge's guest, "somebody's got to help the boy." And the Judge sighed.

The cops went up Hannibal Street, toward Matlin's back lot, with Mr. Daugherty. Matlin lingered at the corner talking to Mrs. Page. In the front window of Matlin's house the curtain fell across the glass.

Mike Russell sidled up to the housekeeper. "Any uncles or aunts here in town? A grandmother?"

"No," she said shortly.

"Brothers or sisters, Mrs. . . .?"

"Miz Somers. No, he's the only one. Only reason they didn't take him along was it's the last week of school and he didn't want to miss."

Mike Russell's brown eyes suggested the soft texture of velvet, and they were deeply distressed. She slid away from their appeal. "He'll just have to take it, I guess, like everybody else," Mrs. Somers said. "These things happen."

He was listening intently. "Don't you care for dogs?"

"I don't mind a dog," she said. She arched her neck. She was going to call to the boy.

"Wait. Tell me, does the family go to church? Is there a pastor or a priest who knows the boy?"

"They don't go, far as I ever

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saw." She looked at him as if he were an eccentric.

"Then school. He has a teacher. What grade?"

"Sixth grade," she said. "Miss Dana. Oh, he'll be okay." Her voice grew loud, to reach the boy and hint to him. "He's a big boy."

Russell said desperately, "Is there no way to telephone his parents?"

"They're on the road. They'll be in some time tomorrow. That's all I know." She was annoyed. "I'll take care of him. That's why I'm here." She raised her voice and this time it was arch and seductive. "Freddy, better come wash your face. I know where there's some chocolate cookies."

The velvet left the young man's eyes. Hard as buttons, they gazed for a moment at the woman. Then he whipped around and left her. He walked over to where the kids had drifted, near the little dead creature on the grass. He said softly, "Bones had his own doctor, Freddy? Tell me his name?" The boy's eyes flickered. "We must know what it was that he took. A doctor can tell. I think his own doctor would be best, don't you?"

The boy nodded, mumbled a name, an address. That Russell mastered the name and the number, asking for no repetition, was a sign of his concern. Besides, it was this young man's quality—that he listened. "May I take him, Freddy? I have a car. We ought to have a blanket," he added gently, "a soft, clean blanket."

"I got one, Freddy..." "My mother'd let me..."

"I can get one," Freddy said brusquely. They wheeled, almost in formation.

Mrs. Somers frowned.

"You must let them take a blanket," Russell warned her, and his eyes were cold.

"I will explain to Mrs. Titus," said the Judge quickly.

"Quite a fuss," she said, and tossed her head and crossed the road.

Russell gave the Judge a quick nervous grin. He walked to the returning cops. "You'll want to run tests, I suppose? Can the dog's own vet do it?"

"Certainly. Humane officer will have to be in charge. But that's what the vet'll want."

"I'll take the dog, then. Any traces up there?"

"Not a thing."

"Will you explain to the boy that you are investigating?"

"Well, you know how these things go." The cop's feet shuffled. "Humane officer does what he can. Probably, Monday, after we identify the poison, he'll check the drug stores. Usually, if it *is* a cranky neighbor, he has already put in a complaint about the dog. This Matlin says he never did. The humane officer will get on it, Monday. He's out of town today. The devil of these cases, we can't prove a thing, usually. You get an

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idea who it was, maybe you can scare him. It's a misdemeanor, all right. Never heard of a conviction, myself."

"But will you explain to the boy?" Russell stopped, chewed his lip, and the Judge sighed.

"Yeah, it's tough on a kid," the cop said.

When the Judge's guest came back it was nearly five o'clock. He said, "I came to say goodbye, sir, and to thank you for the . . ." But his mind wasn't on the sentence and he lost it and looked up.

The Judge's eyes were affectionate. "Worried?"

"Judge, sir," the young man said, "*must* they feed him? Where, sir, in this classy neighborhood is there an understanding woman's heart? I herded them to that Mrs. Allen. But she winced, sir, and she diverted them. She didn't want to think about it. She offered cakes and cokes and games."

"But my dear boy—"

"What do they teach the kids these days, Judge? To turn away? Put something in your stomach. Take a drink. Play a game. Don't weep for your dead. Just skip it, think about something else."

"I'm afraid the boy's alone," the Judge said "but it's only for the night." His voice was melodious. "Can't be sheltered from grief when it comes. None of us can."

"Excuse me, sir, but I wish he *would* grieve. I wish he would bawl his heart out. Wash out that black hate. I ought to go home. None of my concern. It's a woman's job." He moved and his hand went toward the phone. "He has a teacher. I can't help feeling concerned, sir. May I try?"

The Judge said, "Of course, Mike," and he put his brittle old bones into a chair.

Mike Russell pried the number out of the Board of Education. "Miss Lillian Dana? My name is Russell. You know a boy named Freddy Titus?"

"Oh, yes. He's in my class." The voice was pleasing.

"Miss Dana, there is trouble. You know Judge Kittinger's house? Could you come there?"

"What is the trouble?"

"Freddy's little dog is dead of poison. I'm afraid Freddy is in a bad state. There is no one to help him. His folks are away. The woman taking care of him," Mike's careful explanatory sentences burst into indignation, "has no more sympathetic imagination than a broken clothes pole." He heard a little gasp. "I'd like to help him, Miss Dana, but I'm a man and a stranger, and the Judge—" He paused.

"—is old," said the Judge in his chair.

"I'm terribly sorry," the voice on the phone said slowly. "Freddy's a wonderful boy."

"You're his friend?"

"Yes, we're friends."

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"Then, could you come over? You see, we've got to get a terrible idea out of his head. He thinks a man across the street poisoned his dog on purpose. Miss Dana, *he has no doubt!* And he doesn't cry." She gasped again. "Greenwood Lane," he said, "and Hannibal Street—the southeast corner."

She said, "I have a car. I'll come as soon as I can."

Russell turned and caught the Judge biting his lips. "Am I making too much of this, sir?" he inquired humbly.

"I don't like the boy's stubborn conviction." The Judge's voice was dry and clear. "Any more than you do. I agree that he must be brought to understand. But . . ." The old man shifted in the chair. "Of course, the man, Matlin, is a fool, Mike. There is something solemn and silly about him that makes him fair game. He's unfortunate. He married a widow with a crippled child, and no sooner were they married than *she* collapsed. And he's not well off. He's encumbered with that enormous house."

"What does he do, sir?"

"He's a photographer. Oh, he struggles, tries his best, and all that. But with such tension, Mike. That poor misshapen girl over there tries to keep the house, devoted to her mother. Matlin works hard, is devoted, too. And yet the sum comes out in petty strife, nerves, quarrels, uproar. And certainly it cannot be necessary to feud with children."

"The kids have done their share of that, I'll bet," mused Mike. "The kids are delighted—a neighborhood ogre, to add the fine flavor of menace. A focus for mischief. An enemy."

"True enough." The Judge sighed.

"So the myth is made. No rumor about ole Matlin loses anything in the telling. I can see it's been built up. You don't knock it down in a day."

"No," said the Judge uneasily. He got up from the chair.

The young man rubbed his dark head. "I don't like it, sir. We don't know what's in the kids' minds, or who their heroes are. There is only the gang. What do you suppose it advises?"

"What could it advise, after all?" said the Judge crisply. "This isn't the slums, whatever Matlin says." He went nervously to the window and fiddled with the shade pull. He said suddenly, "From my little summer house in the back yard you can overhear the gang. They congregate under that oak. Go and eavesdrop, Mike."

The young man snapped to attention. "Yes, sir."

"I . . . think we had better know," said the Judge, a trifle sheepishly.

The kids sat under the oak, in a grassy hollow. Freddy was the

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core. His face was tight. His eyes never left off watching the house of the enemy. The others watched him, or hung their heads, or watched their own brown hands play with the grass.

They were not chattering. There hung about them a heavy, sullen silence, heavy with a sense of tragedy, sullen with a sense of wrong, and from time to time one voice or another would fling out a pronouncement, which would sink into the silence, thickening its ugliness. . . .

The Judge looked up from his paper. "Could you—?"

"I could hear," said Mike in a quiet voice. "They are condemning the law, sir. They call it corrupt. They are quite certain that Matlin killed the dog. They see themselves as Robin Hoods, vigilantes, defending the weak, the wronged, the dog. They think they are discussing justice. They are waiting for dark. They speak of weapons, sir—the only ones they have. B.B. guns, after dark."

"Great heavens!"

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stop it."

Mrs. Somers was cooking supper when he tapped on the screen. "Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"I want your help, Mrs. Somers. For Freddy."

"Freddy," she interrupted loudly, with her nose high, "is going to have his supper and go to bed his regular time, and that's all about Freddy. Now, what did you want?"

He said, "I want you to let me take the boy to my apartment for the night."

"I couldn't do that!" She was scandalized.

"The Judge will vouch—"

"Now, see here, Mr. What's-your-name—Russell. This isn't my house and Freddy's not my boy. I'm responsible to Mr. and Mrs. Titus. You're a stranger to me. As far as I can see, Freddy is no business of yours whatsoever."

"Which is his room?" asked Mike sharply.

"Why do you want to know?" She was hostile and suspicious.

"Where does he keep his B.B. gun?"

She was startled to an answer. "In the shed out back. Why?"

He told her.

"Kid's talk," she scoffed. "You don't know much about kids, do you, young man? Freddy will go to sleep. First thing he'll know, it's morning. That's about the size of it."

"You may be right. I hope so."

Mrs. Somers slapped potatoes into the pan. Her lips quivered indignantly. She felt annoyed because she was a little shaken.

Russell scanned the street, went

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across to Matlin's house. The man himself answered the bell. The air in this house was stale, and bore the faint smell of old grease. There was over everything an atmosphere of struggle and despair. Many things ought to have been repaired and had not been repaired. The place was too big. There wasn't enough money, or strength. It was too much.

Mrs. Matlin could not walk. Otherwise, one saw, she struggled and did the best she could. She had a lost look, as if some anxiety, ever present, took about nine-tenths of her attention. May Matlin limped in and sat down, lumpishly.

Russell began earnestly, "Mr. Matlin, I don't know how this situation between you and the boys began. I can guess that the kids are much to blame. I imagine they enjoy it." He smiled. He wanted to be sympathetic toward this man.

"Of course they enjoy it." Matlin looked triumphant.

"They call me The Witch," the girl said. "Pretend they're scared of me. The devils. I'm scared of them."

Matlin flicked a nervous eye at the woman in the wheel chair. "The truth is, Mr. Russell," he said in his high whine, "they're vicious."

"It's too bad," said his wife in a low voice. "I think it's dangerous."

"Mama, you mustn't worry," said the girl in an entirely new tone. "I won't let them hurt you. Nobody will hurt you."

"Be quiet, May," said Matlin. "You'll upset her. Of course nobody will hurt her."

"Yes, it is dangerous, Mrs. Matlin," said Russell quietly. "That's why I came over."

Matlin goggled. "What? What's this?"

"Could I possibly persuade you, sir, to spend the night away from this neighborhood? And to depart noisily?"

"No," said Matlin, his ego bristling, "no, you cannot! I will under no circumstances be driven away from my own home." His voice rose. "Furthermore, I certainly will not leave my wife and stepdaughter."

"We could manage, dear," said Mrs. Matlin anxiously.

Russell told them about the talk under the oak, the B.B. gun.

"Devils," said May Matlin, "absolutely."

"Oh, Earl," trembled Mrs. Matlin, "maybe we had all better go away."

Matlin, red-necked, furious, said, "We own this property. We pay our taxes. We have our rights. Let them! Let them try something like that! Then, I think the law would have something to say. This is outrageous! I did not harm that animal. Therefore, I defy . . ." He looked solemn and silly, as the Judge had said, with his face

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crimson, his weak eyes rolling.

Russell rose. "I thought I ought to make the suggestion," he said mildly, "because it would be the safest thing to do. But don't worry, Mrs. Matlin, because I—"

"A B.B. gun can blind," she said tensely.

"Or even worse," Mike agreed. "But I am thinking of the —"

"Just a minute," Matlin roared. You can't come in here and terrify my wife! She is not strong. You have no right." He drew himself up with his feet at a right angle, his pudgy arm extended, his plump jowls quivering. "Get out," he cried. He looked ridiculous.

Whether the young man and the bewildered woman in the wheel chair might have understood each other was not to be known. Russell, of course, got out. May Matlin hobbled to the door and as Russell went through it she said, "Well, you warned us, anyhow." And her lips came together sharply.

Russell plodded across the pavement again. Long enchanting shadows from the lowering sun struck aslant through the golden air and all the old houses were gilded and softened in their green setting. He moved toward the big oak. He hunkered down. The sun struck its golden shafts deep under the boughs. "How's it going?" he asked.

Freddy Titus looked frozen and still. "Okay," said Phil Bourchard with elaborate ease. Light on his owlish glasses hid the eyes.

Mike opened his lips, hesitated. Suppertime struck on the neighborhood clock. Calls, like chimes, were sounding.

"...'s my Mom," said Ernie Allen. "See you after."

"See you after, Freddy."

"Okay."

"Okay."

Mrs. Somers' hoot had chimed with the rest and now Freddy got up stiffly.

"Okay?" said Mike Russell. The useful syllables that take any meaning at all in American mouths asked, "Are you feeling less bitter, boy? Are you any easier?"

"Okay," said Freddy. The same syllables shut the man out.

Mike opened his lips. Closed them. Freddy went across the lawn to his kitchen door. There was a brown crockery bowl on the back stoop. His sneaker, rigid on the angle, stepped over it. Mike Russell watched, and then, with a movement of his arms, almost as if he would wring his hands, he went up the Judge's steps.

"Well?" The Judge opened his door. "Did you talk to the boy?"

Russell didn't answer. He sat down.

The Judge stood over him. "The boy... The enormity of this whole idea *must* be explained to him."

"I can't explain," Mike said. "I open my mouth. Nothing comes out."

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"Perhaps *I* had better."

"What are you going to say, sir?"

"Why, give him the facts," the Judge cried.

"The facts are . . . the dog is dead."

"There are no facts that point to Matlin."

"There are no facts that point to a tramp, either. That's too sloppy, sir."

"What are you driving at?"

"Judge, the boy is more rightfully suspicious than we are."

"Nonsense," said the Judge. "The girl saw the dog's body before Matlin came home."

"There is no alibi for poison," Mike said sadly.

"Are you saying the man is a liar?"

"Liars," sighed Mike. "Truth and lies. How are those kids going to understand, sir? To that Mrs. Page, to the lot of them, truth is only a subjective intention. 'I am no liar,' sez she, sez he. 'I *intend* to be truthful. So do not insult me.' Lord, when will we begin? It's what we were talking about at lunch, sir. What you and I believe. What the race has been told and told in such agony, in a million years of bitter lesson. *Error*, we were saying. Error is the enemy."

He flung out of the chair. "We know that to tell the truth is not merely a good intention. It's a damned difficult thing to do. It's a skill, to be practiced. It's a technique. It's an effort. It takes brains. It takes watching. It takes humility and self-examination. It's a science and an art . . .

"Why don't we tell the *kids* these things? Why is everyone locked up in anger, shouting liar at the other side? Why don't they automatically know how easy it is to be, not wicked, but mistaken? Why is there this notion of violence? Because Freddy doesn't think to himself, 'Wait a minute. I might be wrong.' The habit isn't there. Instead, there are the heroes—the big-muscled, noble-hearted, gun-toting heroes, blind in a righteousness totally arranged by the author. Excuse me, sir."

"All that may be," said the Judge grimly, "and I agree. But the police know the lesson. They—"

"They don't care."

"What?"

"Don't care enough, sir. None of us cares enough—about the dog."

"I see," said the Judge. "Yes, I see. We haven't the least idea what happened to the dog." He touched his pince-nez.

Mike rubbed his head wearily. "Don't know what to do except sit under his window the night through. Hardly seems good enough."

The Judge said simply, "Why don't you find out what happened to the dog?"

The young man's face changed.

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"What we need, sir," said Mike slowly, "is to teach Freddy how to ask for it. Just to ask for it. Just to want it." The old man and the young man looked at each other. Past and future telescoped. *"Now,"* Mike said. "Before dark."

Suppertime, for the kids, was only twenty minutes long. When the girl in the brown dress with the bare blonde head got out of the shabby coupe, the gang was gathered again in its hollow under the oak. She went to them and sank down on the ground. "Ah, Freddy, was it Bones? Your dear little dog you wrote about in the essay?"

"Yes, Miss Dana." Freddy's voice was shrill and hostile. *I won't be touched!* it cried to her. So she said no more, but sat there on the ground, and presently she began to cry. There was contagion. The simplest thing in the world. First, one of the smaller ones, whimpering. Finally, Freddy Titus, bending over. Her arm guided his head, and then he lay weeping in her lap.

Russell, up in the summerhouse, closed his eyes and praised the Lord. In a little while he swung his legs over the railing and slid down the bank. "How do? I'm Mike Russell."

"I'm Lillian Dana." She was quick and intelligent, and her tears were real.

"Fellows," said Mike briskly, "you know what's got to be done, don't you? We've got to solve this case."

They turned their woeful faces.

He said, deliberately, "It's just the same as a murder. It *is* a murder."

"Yeah," said Freddy, and sat up, tears drying. It was ole Matlin."

"Then we have to prove it."

Miss Lillian Dana saw the boy's face lock. He didn't need to prove anything, the look proclaimed. He knew. She leaned over a little and said, "But we can't make an ugly mistake and put it on Bones's account. Bones was a fine dog. Oh, that would be a terrible monument." Freddy's eyes turned, startled.

"It's up to us," said Mike gratefully, "to go after the real facts, with real detective work. For Bones's sake."

"It's the least we can do for him," said Miss Dana, calmly and decisively.

Freddy's face lifted.

"Trouble is," Russell went on quickly, "people get things wrong. Sometimes they don't remember straight. They make mistakes."

"Ole Matlin tells lies," said Freddy.

"If he does," said Russell cheerfully, "then we've got to *prove* that he does. Now, I've figured out a plan, if Miss Dana will help us. You pick a couple of the fellows, Fred. Have to go to all the houses around here and ask some ques-

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tions. Better pick the smartest ones. To find out the truth is very hard," he challenged.

"And then?" said Miss Dana in a fluttery voice.

"Then they, and you, if you will—"

"Me?" She straightened. "I am a schoolteacher, Mr. Russell. Won't the police——"

"Not before dark."

"What are *you* going to be doing?"

"Dirtier work."

She bit her lip. "It's nosey. It's —well, it's not done."

"No," he agreed. "You may lose your job."

She wasn't a bad-looking young woman. Her eyes were fine. Her brow was serious, but there was the ghost of a dimple in her cheek. Her hands moved. "Oh, well, I can always take up beauty culture or something. What are the questions?" She had a pad of paper and a pencil half out of her purse, and looked alert and efficient.

Now, as the gang huddled, there was a warm sense of conspiracy growing. "Going to be the dickens of a job," Russell warned them. And he outlined some questions. "Now, don't let anybody fool you into taking a sloppy answer," he concluded. "Ask how they know. Get real evidence. But don't go to Matlin's—I'll go there."

"I'm not afraid of him." Freddy's nostrils flared.

"I think I stand a better chance of getting the answers," said Russell coolly. "Aren't we after the answers?"

Freddy swallowed. "And if it turns out that—?"

"It turns out the way it turns out," said Russell, rumpling the towhead. "Choose your henchmen. Tough, remember."

"Phil. Ernie." The kids who were left out wailed as the three small boys and their teacher, who wasn't a lot bigger, rose from the ground.

"It'll be tough, Mr. Russell," Miss Dana said grimly. "Whoever you are, thank you for getting me into this."

"I'm just a stranger," he said gently, looking down at her face. "But you are a friend and a teacher." Pain crossed her eyes. "You'll be teaching now, you know."

Her chin went up. "Okay, kids. I'll keep the paper and pencil. Freddy, wipe your face. Stick your shirt in, Phil. Now, let's organize . . ."

It was nearly nine o'clock when the boys and the teacher, looking rather exhausted, came back to the Judge's house. Russell, whose face was grave, reached for the papers in her hands.

"Just a minute," said Miss Dana. "Judge, we have some questions."

Ernie Allen bared all teeth and stepped forward. "Did you see Bones today?" he asked with the

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firm skill of repetition. The Judge nodded. "How many times and when?"

"One. Er . . . shortly before noon. He crossed my yard, going east."

The boys bent over the pad. Then Freddy's lips opened hard. 'How do you know the time, Judge Kittinger?"

"Well," said the Judge, "hm . . let me think. I was looking out the window for my company and just then he arrived."

"Five minutes of one, sir," Mike said.

Freddy flashed around. "What makes you sure?"

"I looked at my watch," said Russell. "I was taught to be exactly five minutes early when I'm asked to a meal." There was a nodding among the boys, and Miss Dana wrote on the pad.

"Then I was mistaken," said the Judge thoughtfully. "It was shortly before one. Of course."

Phil Bourchard took over. "Did you see anyone go into Matlin's driveway or back lot?"

"I did not."

"Were you out of doors or did you look up that way?"

"Yes, I . . . When we left the table. Mike?"

"At two thirty, sir."

"How do you know that time for sure?" asked Freddy Titus.

"Because I wondered if I could politely stay a little longer." Russell's eyes congratulated Miss Lillian Dana. She had made them a team, and on it, Freddy was the How-do-you-know-for-sure Department.

"Can you swear," continued Phil to the Judge, "there was nobody at all around Matlin's back lot then?"

"As far as my view goes," answered the Judge cautiously.

Freddie said promptly, "He couldn't see much. Too many trees. We can't count that."

They looked at Miss Dana and she marked it down on the pad. "Thank you. Now, you have a cook, sir? We must question her."

"This way," said the Judge, rising and bowing.

Russell looked after them and his eyes were velvet again. He met the Judge's twinkle. Then he sat down and ran an eye quickly over some of the sheets of paper, passing each on to his host.

Startled, he looked up. Lillian Dana, standing in the door, was watching his face.

"Do you think, Mike—?"

A paper dropped in the Judge's hand.

"We can't stop," she challenged.

Russell nodded, and turned to the Judge. "May need some high brass, sir." The Judge rose. "And tell me, sir, where Matlin plays golf. And the telephone number of the Salvage League. No, Miss Dana, we can't stop. We'll take it where it turns."

"We must," she said.

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It was nearly ten when the neighbors began to come in. The Judge greeted them soberly. The Chief of Police arrived. Mrs. Somers, looking grim and uprooted in a crepe dress, came. Mr. Matlin, Mrs. Page, Mr. and Mrs. Daugherty, a Mr. and Mrs. Baker, and Diane Bourchard who was sixteen. They looked curiously at the tight little group, the boys and their blonde teacher.

Last of all to arrive was Mr. Russell, who slipped in from the dark veranda, accepted the Judge's nod, and called the meeting to order.

"We have been investigating the strange death of a dog," he began. "Chief Anderson, while we know your department would have done so in good time, we also know you are busy, and some of us," he glanced at the dark windowpane, "couldn't wait. Will you help us now?"

The Chief said genially, "That's why I'm here, I guess." It was the Judge and his stature that gave this meeting standing. Naive, young, a little absurd it might have seemed had not the old man sat so quietly attentive among them.

"Thank you, sir. Now, all we want to know is what happened to the dog." Russell looked about him. "First, let us demolish the tramp theory." Mrs. Page's feathers ruffled. Russell smiled at her. "Mrs. Page saw a man go down Matlin's drive this morning. The Salvage League sent a truck to pick up rags and papers which at ten forty-two was parked in front of the Daughertys'. The man, who seemed poorly dressed in his working clothes, went to the tool room behind Matlin's garage, as he had been instructed to. He picked up a bundle and returned to his truck. Mrs. Page, the man was there. It was only your opinion about him that proves to have been, not a lie, but an error."

He turned his head. "Now, we have tried to trace the dog's day and we have done remarkably well, too." As he traced it for them, some faces began to wear at least the ghost of a smile, seeing the little dog frisking through the neighborhood. "Just before one," Mike went on, "Bones ran across the Judge's yard to the Allens' where the kids were playing ball. Up to this time no one saw Bones *above* Greenwood Lane or *up* Hannibal Street. But Miss Diane Bourchard, recovering from a sore throat, was not in school today. After lunch she sat on her porch directly across from Mr. Matlin's back lot. She was waiting for school to be out, when she expected her friends to come by.

"She saw, not Bones, but Corky, an animal belonging to Mr. Daugherty, playing in Matlin's lot at about two o'clock. I want your opinion. If poisoned bait had been lying there at two, would Corky have found it?"

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"Seems so," said Daugherty. "Thank God that Corky didn't." He bit his tongue. "Corky's a show dog," he blundered.

"But Bones," said Russell gently, "was more like a friend. That's why we care, of course."

"It's a damned shame!" Daugherty looked around angrily.

"It is," said Mrs. Baker. "He was a friend of mine, Bones was."

"Go on," growled Daugherty, "What else did you dig up?"

"Mr. Matlin left for his golf at eleven thirty. Now, you see, it looks as if Matlin couldn't have left poison behind him."

"I most certainly did not," snapped Matlin. "I have said so. I will not stand for this sort of innuendo. I am not a liar. You said it was a conference."

Mike held the man's eye. "We are simply trying to find out what happened to the dog," he said. Matlin fell silent.

"Surely you realize," Mike went on, "that, human frailty being what it is, there may have been other errors in what we were told this afternoon. There was at least one more.

"Mr. and Mrs. Baker worked in their garden this afternoon. Bones abandoned the ball game to visit the Bakers' dog, Smitty. At three o'clock the Bakers, after discussing the time carefully, in case it was too late in the day, decided to bathe Smitty. When they caught him, for his ordeal, Bones was still there. ...So, you see, Miss May Matlin, who says she saw Bones lying by the sidewalk *before three o'clock*, was mistaken."

Matlin twitched. Russell said sharply, "The testimony of the Bakers is extremely clear." The Bakers, who looked alike, both brown outdoor people, nodded vigorously.

"The time at which Mr. Matlin returned is quite well established. Diane saw him. Mrs. Daugherty, next door, decided to take a nap, at five after three. She had a roast to put in at four thirty. Therefore, she is sure of the time. She went upstairs and from an upper window she too saw Mr. Matlin come home. Both witnesses say he drove his car into the garage at three ten, got out, and went around the building to the right of it—*on the weedy side.*"

Mr. Matlin was sweating. His forehead was beaded. He did not speak.

Mike shifted papers. "Now, we know that the kids trooped up to Phil Bourchard's kitchen at about a quarter of three. Whereas Bones, realizing that Smitty was in for it, and shying away from soap and water like any sane dog, went up Hannibal Street at three o'clock sharp. He may have known in some doggy way where Freddy was. Can we see Bones loping up Hannibal Street, going *above* Greenwood Lane?"

"We can," said Daugherty. He

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was watching Matlin. "Besides, he was found above Greenwood Lane soon after."

"No one," said Mike slowly, "was seen in Matlin's back lot, except Matlin. Yet, almost immediately after Matlin was there, the little dog died."

"Didn't Diane—?"

"Diane's friends came at three twelve. Their evidence is not reliable." Diane blushed.

"This—this is intolerable!" croaked Matlin. "Why *my* back lot?"

Daugherty said, "There was no poison lying around my place, I'll tell you that."

"How do you know?" begged Matlin. And Freddy's eyes, with the smudges under them, followed to Russell's face. "Why not in the street? Or from some passing car?"

Mike said, "I'm afraid it's not likely. You see, Mr. Otis Carnavon was stalled at the corner of Hannibal and Lee. Trying to flag a push. Anything thrown from a car on that block he would have seen."

"Was the poison quick?" demanded Daugherty.

"It was quick. The dog could not go far after he got it. He got cyanide."

Marlin's shaking hand removed his glasses. They were wet.

"Some of you may be amateur photographers," Mike said. "Mr. Matlin, is there cyanide in your cellar darkroom?"

"Yes, but I keep it . . . most meticulously . . ." Matlin began to cough.

When the noise of his spasm died, Mike said, "The poison was embedded in ground meat which analyzed, roughly, half beef and the rest pork and veal, half and half." Matlin encircled his throat with his fingers. "I've checked with four neighborhood butchers and the dickens of a time I had," said Mike. No one smiled. Only Freddy looked up at him with solemn sympathy. "Ground meat was delivered to at least five houses in the vicinity. Meat that *was* one-half beef, one-quarter pork, one-quarter veal, was delivered at ten this morning to Matlin's house."

A stir like an angry wind blew over the room. The Chief of Police made some shift of his weight so that his chair creaked.

"It begins to look—" growled Daugherty.

"Now," said Russell sharply, "we must be very careful. One more thing. The meat had been seasoned."

"Seasoned!"

"With salt. And with . . . thyme."

"Thyme," groaned Matlin.

Freddy looked up at Miss Dana with bewildered eyes. She put her arm around him.

"As far as motives are concerned," said Mike quietly, "I can't discuss them. It is inconceivable to me that any man would poison a dog." Nobody spoke. "However,

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where are we?" Mike's voice seemed to catch Matlin just in time to keep him from falling off the chair. "We don't know yet what happened to the dog." Mike's voice rang. "Mr. Matlin, will you help us to the answer?"

Matlin said thickly, "Better get those kids out of here."

Miss Dana moved, but Russell said, "No. They have worked hard for the truth. They have earned it. And if it is to be had, they shall have it."

"You know?" whimpered Matlin.

Mike said, "I called your golf club. I've looked into your trash incinerator. Yes, I know. But I want you to tell us."

Daugherty said, "Well? Well?" And Matlin covered his face.

Mike said gently, "I think there was an error. Mr. Matlin, I'm afraid, did poison the dog. But he never meant to, and he didn't know he had done it."

Matlin said, "I'm sorry . . . It's . . . I can't . . . She means to do her best. But she's a terrible cook. Somebody gave her those . . . those herbs. Thyme . . . thyme in everything. She fixed me a lunch box. I . . . couldn't stomach it. I bought my lunch at the club."

Mike nodded.

Matlin went on, his voice cracking. "I never . . . You see, I didn't even know it was meat the dog got. She said . . . she told me the dog was already dead."

"And of course," said Mike, "in your righteous wrath you never paused to say to yourself, 'Wait, what *did* happen to the dog?' "

"Mr. Russell, I didn't lie. How could I know there was thyme in it? When I got home I had to get rid of the hamburger she'd fixed for me— I didn't want to hurt her feelings. She tries . . . tries so hard . . ." He sat up suddenly. *"But what she tried to do today,"* he said, with his eyes almost out of his head, *"was to poison me!"* His bulging eyes roved. They came to Freddy. He gasped. He said, "Your dog saved my life!"

"Yes," said Mike quickly, "Freddy's dog saved your life. You see, your stepdaughter would have kept trying."

People drew in their breaths. "The buns are in your incinerator," Mike said. "She guessed what happened to the dog, went for the buns, and hid them. She was late, you remember, getting to the disturbance. And she did lie."

Chief Anderson rose.

"Her mother . . ." said Matlin frantically, "her mother . . ."

Mike Russell put his hand on the plump shoulder. "Her mother's been in torment, tortured by the rivalry between you. Don't you think her mother senses something wrong?"

Miss Lillian Dana wrapped Freddy in her arms. "Oh, what a wonderful dog Bones was!" She covered the sound of the other

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voices. "Even when he died, he saved a man's life. Oh, Freddy, he was a wonderful dog."

And Freddy, not quite taking everything in yet, was released to simple sorrow and wept quietly against his friend...

When they went to fetch May Matlin she was not in the house. They found her in the Titus back shed. She seemed to be looking for something.

Next day, when Mr. and Mrs. Titus came home, they found that although the little dog had died, their Freddy was all right. The Judge, Russell, and Miss Dana told them all about it.

Mrs. Titus wept. Mr. Titus swore. He wrung Russell's hand. "...for stealing the gun," he babbled.

But the mother cried, "And for showing him, for teaching him. Oh, Miss Dana, oh, my dear!"

The Judge waved from his veranda as the dark head and the blonde drove away.

"I think Miss Dana likes him," said Ernie Allen.

"How do you know for sure?" asked Freddy Titus.

The message in Charlotte Armstrong's story is worth thinking over, worth your most earnest pondering. Mike Russell asked: What do they teach the kids these days? To turn away? Not to weep for the dead? To skip it? To think of something else? Not to seek the truth? But if we make our children realize how hard it is to discover the truth—that, in Mike Russell's words, to find the truth is a skill, a technique, that it takes brains, watching, humility, and self-examination—if we plant, nourish, cultivate that precious seed in our children's minds, then the world will soon be a far different world, and a better one.

Again, as in the past 128 years, the detective story points the way, teaches the lesson we must all learn in order to achieve peace on earth, good will toward man. Truth is justice, tolerance, and understanding—by the people, for the people, of the people—regardless of race, color, or creed. That, and that alone, is the secret of a United World—the hope, and the only hope, for a better tomorrow...

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It has been said that marriages are arranged in Heaven. But the marriage between Henrietta Fowler and Thomas Parker was most definitely arranged by Henrietta. And it took Mr. Parker twenty years to decide to rearrange it ...

THE EMANCIPATION OF MR. PARKER

by ROBERT HOSKINS

MR. THOMAS PARKER DECIDED TO kill his wife on the eve of his 53rd birthday.

The day held particular significance for him, for it was just 20 years earlier that he had first met Henrietta Fowler. Mr. Parker was that rarity, a young man of no promise whatever who had proceeded to live up to his elders' expectations. He had been graduated from high school in the bottom quarter of his class, had accepted the first offer of employment that came his way—clerk in a hardware store—and continued in that position for the next 15 years, never advancing, never seeking advancement.

A colorless man, Mr. Parker lived a colorless existence, his working days a humdrum drabness, his leisure time a pursuit of unexcitement. He had a cheap radio, but more of his time was spent in the world of books, for the simple reason that he did not know how to involve himself in any other activity. Indeed, as a listener he learned to parrot the opinions of the studio audiences, but never learned to create an opinion of his own.

He read the daily local paper for news of people he knew; nonlocal events and personalities were beyond the pale. He was the sort of individual who should have lived in a single room in a rundown boarding house, except for the fact that the sole family property of note had passed into his keeping with the death of his mother. This event occurred on his 24th birthday, to the accompaniment of the doctor's opinion that her demise had come from sheer futility.

The house remained his only so long as he continued to live in it. On his departure, or his death without issue, the property would

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pass into the possession of the local university. Since 200 prime bottomland acres accompanied the house, the Chancellor of the university made it his business to keep a friendly and paternal eye on Parker. That person was particularly pleased when Mr. Parker remained unmarried.

The house, of course, was much too large for the needs of one bachelor of simple tastes. So shortly after his mother's funeral Parker closed off all the rooms except the kitchen and a small adjoining room which had originally been a pantry but which he had converted into a bedroom by the installation of a wardrobe, a sprung rocker, and a daybed that might have been comfortable during the Warren G. Harding administration, but certainly never since; and naturally he kept the downstairs bathroom. Like the house, the bathroom was Victorian: the water closet was wooden, operated by an overhead chain, the sink marble-topped with brass faucets, and the bathtub stepped.

The kitchen and bedroom were heated by the massive, old-fashioned wood-burning range; the bathroom received hot water from a small coal burner that had been installed before the beginning of World War II. During the winter, when drafts made every room but the kitchen uninhabitable, Mr. Thomas Parker moved his daybed in near the range and made his trips to the bathroom as few as possible.

The mansard-roofed house was beyond the city limits, sharing a section that an enthusiastic post-Civil War builder had once visualized as the coming area with a dozen other equally ancient houses, two high-fenced junkyards, and a rather decrepit nursery that never seemed to be in bloom. The area was serviced by a secondary county road that was well-pocked by neglect.

Mr. Parker was a fastidious housekeeper, although the outside of the house gave no strong evidence of this. He did manage to keep a ten-foot strip on either side of the house mowed, and made an effort toward keeping the rosebushes that grew in wild profusion in some sort of order. But his thumb was not particularly green, and the work was wearying.

He was carrying a load of accumulated rubbish to the pit he had dug in the middle of the meadow behind the house, 200 feet away, when a voice suddenly spoke behind him.

"You, there!"

Mr. Parker jumped, startled, and turned to see a horse-faced overlong body that seemed entirely wrapped in tweeds. Only the fact that she was wearing a skirt made it evident that the owner of the voice was female. Her hair was cropped mannishly short and pin-

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ned under a porkpie hat. A rough-hewn walking stick swung in her right hand.

"You own this place?"

He stammered in embarrassment before admitting the fact. He looked about, wondering where she had come from, then spotted a middle-aged sedan parked by the side of the road.

"Disgraceful," she said. "A positive eyesore. You should be ashamed of yourself."

She circled the house, examining the outside features, occasionally tapping the stick against unsound clapboards or cracks in the foundation. Mr. Parker followed her, not knowing what else to do, unconscious of the fact that he was still carrying the load of trash.

Finally she stopped, staring at the sagging porch which ran completely across the front and halfway down one side. She tapped a closely trimmed fingernail against her lower teeth.

"I'm Henrietta Fowler," she said. "What's it like inside?"

Speechless, he led her inside, burning with embarrassment. She looked over the kitchen, sniffed at the range, shook her head at his bedroom, and began prowling through the unused rooms, sweeping cobwebs aside with her hand and lifting age-brittle yellowed sheets from furniture.

"Some fair pieces here. What isn't rotted."

The tour of the house seemed to take an eternity, during which Mr. Parker finally realized that he was still holding the trash. He carefully placed it in a corner of the hall. At last they returned to the porch.

"Disgraceful what you've done to this place. Has to be rebuilt from the cellar up. The floors are rotten. Joists seem sound, though, and the timbers. They built to last in those days. How much do you want for it?"

"I . . . I beg your pardon?"

"I want to buy the place. You said you were the owner. You are, aren't you?"

He stammered again, then finally admitted the circumstances of his stewardship of the property.

"I see," she said, musing, tapping her teeth again. "That makes things a little difficult. You—what is your name?"

"Thomas Parker, Miss Fowler."

"Parker. Solid old name. First family, although apparently come to a bad end. Miracle this place hasn't fallen down around your ears!"

He stood in suffering silence, not knowing what to answer. She looked him over, giving him the feeling that he was being inspected as closely as the house.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-three, tomorrow. That's my birthday."

"Good age. Only a year older than me." Henrietta would never again see 43, but she saw no rea-

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son for making this information public. The facts were recorded in the proper places; the curious and nosey ones could dig them out without her help. "You have a job?"

"Uh ... Yes." He explained.

"Demeaning occupation. You'll have to quit."

"But ..." Mr. Parker found himself being swept away before the overpowering force of Henrietta Fowler. Never in his life had he known such a person.

"You don't need to work any longer, Thomas. I have enough money for both of us."

"Both of us?"

"Of course. We'll be married—let's see; today is Tuesday. Judge Thorpe loves his silly rules, that idiot three-day waiting period. We'll be married on Saturday."

Words failed Thomas Parker.

For years Henrietta Fowler had been waiting for her father to die and decently turn the reins of the Fowler estate over to her capable hands. Many times she had suggested that she begin to assume some of the control while he was alive, but the old gentleman, the genetic storehouse from which Henrietta drew all her traits, was irascible enough to insist on handling things himself.

It was a foregone conclusion that she would leave the family manse—like the Parker house, a Victorian monstrosity that dated back to the Civil War. Except that the Fowler home was in the "good" section of town and properly staffed by servants. Not that the old man was wasteful of his money; it was just that, as he grew older, he needed more and more services performed, until, at the end, the staff included a housekeeper, cook, butler-handyman, three full-time private nurses, and two part-time LPN's who relieved the others. The old man had also wanted a chauffeur, but this extravagance Henrietta nipped in the bud by volunteering to be the driver herself.

Henrietta was sick of the Fowler house and its particular reminders of her father and his strong will; but the architecture was too much a part of her to permit her to consider any of the modern constructions favored by the architects and real estate men who had dreams of siphoning off a share of the Fowler money. A chance errand had taken her on the road that led past the Parker house; it was so close in appearance to what her subconscious demanded that she fell in love with it and determined to make it her own.

At any price—including marriage to Thomas Parker.

Not that marriage was such a bad idea. She had often considered the advantages of a husband to a woman who headed such a substantial list of enterprises. But the

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sort of men willing to marry a horse-faced virago were not the sort that she would have considered, even if her father had ever given his permission. Which he would not have done while a breath of life remained in him.

Not that she wanted a handsome manly sort, either; Henrietta knew that she was born to be boss, and she intended to live her heritage to the fullest.

Thomas Parker had absolutely nothing going for him, beyond his ownership of a property she happened to desire. On the other hand, there was nothing going against him, either. He was a complete nonentity, and as such, completely controllable.

The assessment was made quickly, without conscious thought, and once made, her course of action was determined and decided. The marriage followed in natural order.

Of course she had a title search made on the Parker property first, hoping that there might have been an error, and that some other way of taking possession might turn up. But when the title proved clear she resigned herself to the inevitable.

And Mr. Parker found himself married.

During the next few years events carried him along. Henrietta insisted that he give up his job, but when he complained of boredom, she bought him a hardware store of her own, then installed a bright young man of her own choosing to be manager. Mr. Parker realized what she was doing, but at least he had an excuse for activity.

He came to spend his days in the store, finding mild satisfaction in replacing an occasional broken pane of glass or repairing a bicycle inner tube. Thanks to the ingenuity and drive of the young manager, the store, located in a new development for young marrieds, produced a handsome profit. Henrietta permitted Parker to take a rather handsome salary for himself, although he had nothing in particular to do with the money. He solved the problem by making generous donations to every charity that approached him.

The manager reported his various acts of charity, and Henrietta made sure they were properly listed on the annual tax returns.

Her first major project was the renovation of the Parker House. They temporarily moved into a two-bedroom suite in the town's best hotel. An army of carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, and electricians worked miracles in the Victorian monstrosity. Henrietta's love of the past only extended to the outer appearances; in a matter of months the house had been gutted and rebuilt inside from the cellar up. The house was furnished with tasteful antiques from a mixture of periods that blended well together —all except the kitchen.

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The latter, now the domain of the Fowler cook, was a gleaming futuristic marvel in chrome and copper. The first time he was led through it Mr. Parker could scarcely bring himself to do more than tiptoe across the highly polished tile.

Henrietta asked his opinion about only one change.

"What color would you prefer your room, Thomas?"

"Brown," he said, absent-mindedly.

"Brown? Good heavens, no! Much too drab." The decorator who accompanied her shuddered in agreement.

"But I like brown," he protested mildly.

"It's out of the question," said Henrietta firmly.

And that was that. The area of disagreement was dismissed from her thoughts, so sure was she that he would meekly follow her lead. And in truth he did not protest further; but the small contention was filed away in a secret part of his brain.

Life settled into a routine that quickly became habit. At first he found it difficult to adjust to having servants, but personal service is the easiest habit to adjust to, and the hardest to break.

Six days a week he rose at seven A.M., conscious that Henrietta was already up and busy in her part of the house. While she was being served breakfast in her room, he hurried through his toilet, and then went down to the kitchen to eat under the watchful eye of the cook while Henrietta left for the paper mill offices that were her headquarters in her battle against a world full of Fowler-money-hungry predators.

At eight Thomas Parker permitted the handyman to drive him to the hardware store. The trip always took exactly ten minutes, unless they were delayed behind a school bus and forced to wait for it to load and unload. He prided himself on arriving at the store precisely fifteen minutes ahead of the manager.

By the time the manager arrived, Mr. Parker would have the store open and the outside display set up. Then he retired to his cubby-hole office with the morning newspaper while the younger man made sure the porter properly swept out the corners and washed the plate-glass windows.

The years passed quickly—a gray blur that later became marked by a growing disenchantment with the world of television and other innocuous entertainments. In time Mr. Parker became aware of a certain lack in his life, and in secret, he searched for something to fill the void, unaware that Henrietta was being told all his adventures. She did not really care what he did, so long as he did not bring shame on the marriage. And his ventures into the world of women

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and alcohol were quickly made, and as quickly abandoned; he was too timid for the former, and too allergic to alcohol for the latter.

The years were passing for Henrietta, too—busy years in which she exercised the full powers of the substanial Fowler money. But in time she grew bored with the family businesses, and more aware of a lack in her family life. At last she decided that the trouble lay with Mr. Parker.

"Thomas, you don't get out in the world enough," she said firmly, one evening in the spring. "You should involve yourself more with people, and things."

"I beg your pardon, dear?" he said mildly.

At that moment she decided to change him. The image that had satisfied her for so many years was no longer good enough.

"You don't know enough people."

"Oh, but I know all of your friends, dear."

"That's just the trouble, Thomas—they're my friends. You have no friends of your own. You should get out and meet people—join a club, perhaps."

"I don't really think..."

Of course it didn't matter what he thought. Henrietta spoke to a couple of her close associates, and the next thing Mr. Parker knew, he was being inducted into the Lions and dragged to Kiwanis and Rotary and Chamber of Commerce. Not that he minded once he became involved with the service aspects of the organizations; the void in his life was finally becoming filled.

In her reconstruction of her husband Henrietta also came to the conclusion that he should become a person of some local importance, a man whose thoughts and opinions would be respected. In the process it might be interesting to build him a backbone. Nearly two decades of complete control over his life were beginning to bore her.

She began breaking in on his reveries. "Thomas, something has to be done about those labor organizers at the box factory. What do you suggest?"

A few days later: "Thomas, the school appropriation this year is absolutely ridiculous! I don't know what that Sam Thorpe can be thinking of, permitting those idiots to throw money away. If his father, the old judge, were still alive, things would be different."

"Yes, dear. I suppose you're right."

"Well?"

"Well, what, dear?"

"What do you propose to do about it?"

"I don't know, dear. I'll think about it."

The following week: "Thomas, the roof needs repairing, and the men at the plant are all tied up. Do you think that old Mr. Hill could be trusted to do the job?"

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Decisions, decisions, on a hundred different subjects, large and small. As often as not, Henrietta ignored his viewpoint, although she tried not to let him know that, except when it coincided with her own. But on the smallest matters at first, and as months passed, on the more important ones, she began to defer to his judgment. Without realizing it, she found it pleasant to accept the decisions of another. Her father had been out of her life a long time, and she rarely thought of him now. If anyone had told her that she missed the old man, she would have scoffed. But she did miss something. It might have been her father.

Mr. Parker's confidence began to grow until he was no longer diffident about expressing his views. Frequently he didn't know anything about the subject under discussion, but he quickly learned that knowledge was not necessary; forcefulness was what counted.

He began to take control of the small things of their life together, ordering the servants about as though he had always done so. At first they resented the new direction things were taking, but they quickly grew accustomed to it.

The world of service organizations was fulfilling, but he soon grew to realize that the major portion of his wife's life still lay beyond his new control. He began to envy her, and began to make surreptitious visits to the various plants and factories she controlled. The manager of the local bank grew to expect and dread his visits, filled with niggardly complaints about Henrietta's instructions. Occasionally Parker countermanded those instructions, aware that the manager would get in touch with her as soon as Parker left. But his growing frustrations were forcing him to strike out against Henrietta in every way possible.

And then he finally decided that he must intrude on her world completely. He thought of a thousand ways of broaching the topic, but all seemed to have one fault or another. Finally he decided that the best way was to simply force the issue into the open. That evening he waited until supper was over and the cook had cleared away the last of the dishes. He dabbed at his lips with his napkin while Henrietta sipped her usual second cup of coffee.

"Henrietta, I've been thinking, and I've made up my mind."

"Yes, dear," she said absently, her mind on a sheaf of quarterly reports she'd brought home from the plant.

"I've decided that it is time I took a hand in the business."

"What?" She looked up, not certain she had heard correctly.

"I really feel quite ashamed that I haven't done so before now. It hasn't been fair to you, having to carry such a load alone But you won't have to worry any longer."

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"Thomas, you're babbling!"

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I am not babbling. As head of this household it is only fitting that I carry my proper share of the load."

"You're babbling," she repeated firmly. "What ever gave you the idea that you're head of anything? I wouldn't turn a lemonade stand over to your keeping."

"But..." He bit at his lower lip, staring at her. Then he pushed back from the table, carefully laid his napkin beside his plate, got up, and left the room.

He had just decided to kill her.

It was the eve of his 53rd birthday.

The subject of murder had never before interested Mr. Parker. It was something you read about in books, or saw on television. Occasionally the newspapers would carry details of crimes of violence. But murder was never a personal subject. It had never happened to anyone he knew, either in perpetration or victimization.

He decided that it would be a good idea to research various methods, but he knew of no place to do this. After all, it didn't seem reasonable to walk into the public library and say to the librarian, "I've decided to kill my wife. Where would I find some good suggestions?"

So he began to read crime books and magazines, marveling at the ingenuity shown by the murderers. But there was always a particular fault with all their plans: the murderer would ultimately be caught.

It eventually seemed to him that the safest methods were those of omission, rather than of commission. But when it came to actually planning the event, his newfound courage of his convictions was not enough to implant original thoughts in his mind. He thought over the many methods used in the stories, and discarded them all.

When the opportunity finally came his way it almost passed without his recognizing it.

Sunday mornings he permitted himself the luxury of staying in bed until ten. By the time he had made a leisurely toilet and descended to the kitchen for his usual Sunday coffee and toast, which had to hold him until Henrietta's appointed noon-hour meal, it was almost eleven. He entered the kitchen to discover Henrietta wearing one of the cook's aprons and fussing over the cutting board.

"Where is Mrs. Bohlan?"

"Her husband is sick," Henrietta replied. "I let her go home."

"And you are preparing dinner?"

"Of course," she said sharply. "I am capable of preparing a simple chicken dinner."

"I just thought we might go to a restaurant," he said mildly.

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"You know I never eat out on Sundays, Thomas."

"Yes, dear."

He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down at the table to watch his wife. If Henrietta knew how to cook, the talent was one she had learned before their marriage. She had never even prepared a sandwich for them since the marriage.

A deep fryer was hissing and sputtering on the back of the outsized gas stove. Mr. Parker looked at it for a moment. "I believe your cooking oil is too hot, Henrietta."

She glanced up in exasperation. "If I want your comments I'll ask for them."

"Yes, dear."

She finished coating the chicken pieces with a batter that seemed extremely lumpy to him, wiped her hands on her apron, and stood for a moment, staring at the stove. Finally she made up her mind and started for the range. She picked up two mittens she used as pot holders and pulled the deep cooker to the front of the stove. She started back toward the worktable, then changed her mind, turned, and tried to pick up the cooker.

"Henrietta!"

His word of caution was wasted. She was carefully maneuvering the cooker toward the worktable, walking slowly. The hot oil was still sputtering.

He stood up and started toward her to relieve her of the burden. It was on his tongue to ask her what she thought she was doing, taking the cooker off the stove, but he decided against making any further comments while she was in her present mood.

Three steps from the stove several particles of grease spattered against her bare arm. She yelped involuntarily, and jerked; half a cup of grease sloshed out of the cooker and onto the floor. She took a half step, and slid into the grease. Her feet shot out from under her and the cooker went flying, spreading scalding grease in a wide arc about the room.

She screamed once in the pain of the scalding grease, and then her head hit the floor.

He started toward her, then backed up as a small amount of grease landed on the stove and in flame. The flames started to lick down the side of the stove, and he thought to put out the fire. Before he could reach it, however, the fire died for lack of fuel to feed on.

He went to Henrietta, kneeling carefully to avoid the grease. He fingered the lump on the back of her head, nodding in satisfaction when he could find no blood. He stood up and started for the extension phone, then stopped in midstride. He looked back at Henrietta again, then once more at the stove—and the course of his future was decided.

The outer edges of the puddle

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of grease were already congealing. He found a book of matches on the window sill over the stove, struck a match, nurtured it for a second to make sure it was burning fully, then tossed it into the middle of the grease. The first match sputtered out. He lit another and carefully laid it on a grease-soaked spot on her apron.

Everyone was properly solicitous. After the firemen and the men from the undertaker's left, the Sheriff stayed only a brief moment.

"Terrible shock, Mr. Parker. Mrs. Parker was well thought of."

"Thank you, Sheriff." He sighed and bit his lip. "I really don't know what I'm going to do without her. I... I've never taken much hold of the business before. I suppose I'm going to have a lot to learn."

The doctor came in at that moment, an officiously busy little man, just in time to overhear his comment. He frowned.

"You're going to take over the business operations, Mr. Parker?"

"Of course," he replied. "It's what Henrietta would have wanted."

The Sheriff cleared his throat. "Yes, well, I'm sure everything will work out for the best. Right now, Doc, I think Mr. Parker needs to rest." He took his leave.

"I am tired," Mr. Parker admitted. There was a pleasant glow spreading through him. It seemed impossible that Henrietta was no longer here, but there was a wide world waiting for him without her. And thanks to the Fowler fortune there was nothing in that world he could not have.

There was another, stranger feeling building up inside him. No longer was he subservient to Henrietta. From now on people would be doing what he wanted. It would be the first time in his life, and it was a heady, exhilarating feeling.

"You should rest," the doctor was saying. Mr. Parker forced his attention back to the present.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You should rest, Mr. Parker. I'll give you a sedative—"

"No!" He shook his head. "I'll be quite all right."

The last of the hangers-on of the tragedy left, and the doctor smiled.

"I'm sure you will, Mr. Parker. Of course, you weren't really serious about taking over the business operations, were you?"

"Certainly I'm serious. Why shouldn't I be serious?"

"It will be difficult without Mrs. Parker at the helm, but she does —did—have a great many able assistants. I really think they should be permitted to continue without interference."

"What? Who... Who do you think you are? You can't talk to me that way!"

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"I'm a stockholder, Mr. Parker. I'm interested in protecting my investment."

"Get out! Get out of here!"

The doctor smiled. "You can't get rid of me, Mr. Parker."

"We'll see. I'll get the Sheriff—"

The doctor held up his hand. "Please do. I'm sure he'll be interested in what I found on Mrs. Parker's body."

"Found?" He had started for the door; now he stopped and half turned to see the other man holding something in his fingers. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"A common book match," the doctor said, speaking in a disinterested tone, as though he were a teacher delivering a lecture to a captive audience of bored students. "Only there's something a little different about this match. It came from Mrs. Parker's body. And it seems to be soaked in some sort of grease—cooking oil, perhaps."

Mr. Parker's newfound world began to crumble about him. The doctor continued: "Everyone knows you for what you are—were. No one could ever understand why she married you, but then Henrietta was a very complex woman. She often acted as though you were nothing more than a house pet. That's just what you were—a pet. A useless creature, giving absolutely nothing of value to anyone. You can't do anything, you can't be anything."

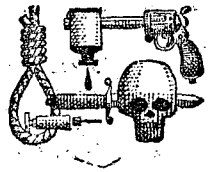
"Stop!" He covered his ears. The doctor stared at him for a moment, then reached out and slapped his face, sharply.

"Pay attention to me!"

Mr. Parker began to sob. A look of disgust came over the doctor's face. "Worthless, useless. And you'll continue that way. You will not interfere with anyone or anything. From now on you'll do what I tell you."

He held up the match again, studying it for a moment.

"I never cared for pets," he murmured.



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a *NEW* crime story by

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

first publication in the United States

So far as we have been able to check, "The Lying-in-State Affair" is the only short story by the late Margery Allingham—and oh, how she is missed!—the only short story by the creator of Albert Campion that was never published in an American magazine. We hope that statement is completely inaccurate; we hope that some criminological critic, some detective-story aficionado, will write and tell us that we are wrong, that there are other previously unpublished short stories by Margery Allingham. It would mean that "The Lying-in-State Affair" is not, in a sense, the last of Margery Allingham's stories, that there is at least one more we can bring to you. But, alas, we fear the accuracy of our research . . .

And now, read about the curious events in which Mr. Robbins, manager of Alderton's Hotel in London, found himself enmeshed . . .

THE LYING-IN-STATE AFFAIR

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

How the body of the young Emir of Eulistahn came to lie in state in the vaults of the Norfolk Street Safe Deposit is one of London's secrets. The city takes its overseas visitors far more seriously than most of them suspect. Under a blank exterior there lurks an almost fanatical determination to oblige the poor lunatics, however absurd their requirements. All it insists upon is the exercise of a modicum of common sense.

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On this occasion it was the famous, if slightly ramshackle Alderton's Hotel which did the insisting. The Emir's entourage was composed of his black-bearded uncle, his doctor, two private secretaries, and the best part of half a dozen valets and cooks.

His death occurred very suddenly, less than two hours after his arrival in London to attend a Royal wedding, and the first reaction of his staff was to demand that he lie in state for two days in the center of his private drawing-room overlooking the park.

Even this could have been arranged had it not been for the enormous value of the state jewelry which, according to protocol, the corpse had to be arrayed in.

Actually, Mr. Sidney Robbins, who was the manager of Alderton's, had won a minor tussle about this very jewelry before the party arrived in London at all.

Mr. Robbins was one of those placid businessmen who appear to have been knitted rather loosely out of wooly good nature until something arises to threaten their interests, at which point they become opaque-eyed and quite incredibly obstinate. Therefore, when the Emir's Second Secretary, who was young, slim, and olive-skinned, had first arrived earlier in the month to make the original hotel reservation and had mentioned, in an impeccable Oxford accent, the question of adequate protection for the Diamond Shawl, the Pigeon's Egg Rings, the Five Emerald Stars, and the Black Pearl, Mr. Robbins put his foot down at once.

He pointed out that the Emir would be only one of five foreign Royalties honoring the hotel, and whereas the security arrangements were adequate for most eventualities, this occasion was a little out of the ordinary. He then recommended the Norfolk Street Safe Deposit, as he always did in similar circumstances.

The Second Secretary protested that His Highness was bringing the jewels to *wear*, first at the Reception and Ball and, the next day, at Westminster Abbey, and he mentioned several illustrious sponsors. But he was no match for Mr. Robbins when it came to discreet name dropping and in the end he listened meekly to the merits of the Safe Deposit.

Everything Mr. Robbins said about the place was quite true. It *was* a British Institution, it *was* used by the highest in the land, all personnel *were* appointed on a basis of heredity, and safety and discretion were indeed guaranteed. In the midst of a covetous world it lay inviolable, a nest of five steel chambers deep in the yellow London clay.

A great deal of legend surrounded the safe deposit's contents. At least two South American dictators were said to prefer it to Switzer-

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land for the safekeeping of certain negotiable items; the secret recipes of two sauces and one world-famous liqueur were certainly there, for their advertisers said so; and connoisseurs were always criticizing the Stanoway family for hiding the rarest of all art treasures in its darkness—three little studies for the *Mona Lisa,* only a few inches square, made in sanguine and said to be as fresh and lovely as the day Leonardo da Vinci drew them. Yet the Stanoways were poor, one would have thought. The first Countess had laid waste most of the family fortune before her lord divorced her in one of the bitterest suits on record; and the second poor lady, her son (who was the heir), and his young sister were kept busy exhibiting the mansion at half a crown per tourist. But the Leonardos remained out of sight to add to the covetous dreams of wealthy collectors all over the world.

After listening for half an hour, the Emir's Second Secretary gave way gracefully and negotiations were hurried through. At Norfolk Street the Second Secretary hired a small casket in his own name in Vault 4 where the smaller containers were kept, and as decreed by the regulations, he received its key with the number of the box engraved upon it. He then walked back and forth three times before a panel of scrutineers and had it explained to him that the mere physical possession of the key meant nothing. The depositor must always come in person whenever the box was opened. The jewels were then solemnly handed over and the Chief Custodian assured him that at any time of the day or night one of the guards of Vault 4, who now knew the Second Secretary by sight, would be waiting for him. These were the unvarying rules of the establishment.

The Second Secretary left, but a few weeks later all his happy arrangements were violently upset.

The blow fell on the eve of the wedding, for the sickly young Emir arrived at the hotel in a state of collapse and died almost at once. He had, it seemed, defied his doctors' advice and a long trip had proved fatal.

It was a great shock, said the black-bearded uncle, but no doubt the will of Heaven. As for earth and Eulistahn in particular, tradition demanded that the body lie in state "for a setting and rising of the sun," with all the royal jewels and regalia. A strong police guard—say, twenty chosen men—must be arranged for.

Mr. Robbins was appalled. It was against his whole philosophy to disoblige distinguished guests, but at such a moment it was impossible.

It was the Second Secretary who came to his rescue, and his words

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burst on the distracted manager with the blessing of water in a desert.

Instead of taking the jewels to the Emir, why not take the Emir to the jewels? Have the lying-in-state in the vaults? Mr. Robbins trembled with relief. It was unconventional, but reasonable. Ludicrous even, but practical.

"Could it be arranged?" murmured the Second Secretary.

"Leave it to me," said Mr. Robbins confidently.

Within an hour the Emir's frail body was taken to the Safe Deposit and carried into Vault 4 by his own people. They laid it reverently on a table moved down from the Chief Custodian's room and the Second Secretary, accompanied by the guard on duty, unlocked the steel box and took out the leather jewel cases. Then, as the official withdrew discreetly to the doorway, the uncle assisted by a doctor and a valet arrayed the body in its traditional glory.

When the ritual was complete, everybody retired to the anteroom and the guard locked the door of the vault. For the rest of the night the four privileged members of the Emir's household took turns, two at a time, to keep the death watch from the guard's bench while the guard himself retired to the far end of the apartment where he could see but not overhear.

The Safe Deposit made only one stipulation in the whole sad business. No publicity. Since the same request was echoed by the Emir's entourage and had also been made by Mr. Robbins on behalf of the hotel, there was no difficulty about it.

In the dawn the next day, when Norfolk Street was empty, a motor hearse drew up outside the Safe Deposit, a coffin was carried in, and presently brought out again. The Emir's uncle shook hands with the Chief Custodian, and the Second Secretary paid the bill. Mr. Robbins was formally thanked and presented with a signed portrait of the late Emir.

The rest of the day was devoted to the wedding and no one in London was permitted to think of anything else. Mr. Robbins forgot about the Emir—indeed, in the flurry of 300 departures, he had little time to recall the Emir during the following week; but some ten days later, when the hotel was its dull discreet self again, his eyes rested on the portrait of the young Emir and he wondered about his successor.

For all up-to-date information he had long ceased to rely on the printed word. He had a very good friend on the central switchboard of the British News Service and on impulse he dialed her number. As usual she had the answer at her fingertips. Cool and efficient, her lovely voice came back to him with authority.

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"Eulistahn? It hasn't existed for some time. Don't you remember Ernst Bey took over all that corner last year, Emir? Oh, no. That title has been extinct for a generation. Can I help you?"

Mr. Robbins hung up very slowly and sat still. From a spot just above the nape of his neck a sliver of ice ran smoothly down his spine. He put out his hand to telephone the Safe Deposit, then withdrew it cautiously, and from that moment his life became a nightmare of apprehension. Yet gradually the days passed and no whisper reached him and after a while he gave up waking in the night in a sweat.

But the question remained in his mind. Seven months crept by and still there was no inquiry, no scandal. The Emir and his retinue could have been as insubstantial and meaningless as a dream.

The news that the Earl of Stanoway was permitting the world to see the Mona Lisa studies after all and the usual controversy about whether or not he should be allowed to sell them across the Atlantic broke in the spring of the following year. Naturally there was gossip.

People remembered the story of how the first countess at the time of her divorce had taken the drawings and placed them in the Safe Deposit. "Enclosed with this letter is the key of the box," she had written to her lord. "So don't ever accuse me of robbing you. Whenever you want the drawings, come round and apologize and we'll go together and get them from the vault. You see, without me, they just won't let you in. It's as simple as that, my dear man. Just apologize and then you can go to hell."

Mr. Robbins heard the gossip and tried hard to put two and two together, but with no result —until one day his eye lighted on a paragraph in one of the more frivolous of the news magazines. It was no more than a caption under a laughing picture of a young brother and sister in fancy dress, the boy dark, the girl fragile, and both curiously familiar somehow to Mr. Robbins.

"Recently much in the news because of the proposed sale of a family treasure, Viscount Bluebrooke, son and heir of the Earl of Stanoway, and his sister, Lady Sarah, are both of an age when there is no greater fun than the stage. They are said to be quite dedicated to their hobby and, I am told, even Lord Stanoway was compelled to grow a vast black beard to suit a recent role. The family motto is in old French and can be translated: *Without Impudence I Take My Own.*"

Mr. Robbins looked at the somewhat fuzzy portrait of the young Emir and then at the girl in the magazine. After that he tore them both up into very small pieces.

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a NEW Father Crumlish story by

ALICE SCANLAN REACH

Father Francis Xavier Crumlish, pastor of St. Brigid's poverty-stricken parish, was in a never-ending conflict with his archenemy, the most formidable of opponents, Satan himself. Indeed, the pastor's sprawling parish, perpetually shrouded with grain dust and the soot and smoke of the steel mills, had its own "Satan's Alley," where the Devil was, alas, firmly entrenched and where violence and crime flourished. It was to this Garden of Evil that Father Crumlish went to investigate the murder of an ex-burlesque queen who had been brutally beaten and robbed. And always Satan was uncomfortably near the good priest—too near . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH REMEMBERS HIS POE

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

IT WAS THE UNSHAKEABLE conviction of Father Francis Xavier Crumlish that, if St. Peter ever opened the pearly gates and ushered him inside, he would be permitted to spend hours on end doing what he was doing now—relaxing his arthritis-plagued joints under a cozy down-filled comforter, reading from the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe, one of his favorite authors, while he kept one ear cocked toward his turned-low bedside radio in case Willie Mays should be doing something grand for the Giants. He'd been enjoying himself thusly for all of half an hour when the telephone bell on his night table shattered the rectory's quiet.

"St. Brigid's," the pastor said as he brought the receiver to his ear.

"It's Tom, Father."

Usually the familiar voice of Lieutenant Thomas Patrick "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force brought a pleased smile to Father Crumlish's lined face—and for a very good reason; if it

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hadn't been for his determined intervention some years ago, handsome young Madigan might now be the lawbreaker he started out to be instead of the law enforcer he had become. But on occasions like the present, when the policeman called at such a late hour, the old priest's features shadowed with anxiety. Instinctively he knew that one of his lambs, faithful or stray, was in distress.

"What is it, Tom?"

"Eddie Ring's been shot—bad—and he's asking for you. I could send a car—"

"Give me five minutes, lad," Father broke in, and hung up the phone.

Big Tom was standing at the emergency entrance to Mercy Hospital when the police car drew up and deposited the priest.

"How did it happen, Tom?" Father asked as Madigan steered him down a corridor.

"Ring pulled a gun on Larry Korman in his liquor store. When Larry handed over the cash, Eddie dashed for the door. But before he made it, Korman grabbed his own gun and plugged him."

"God help us!"

"That's not all," Madigan said, grim-faced. "Ring's given us a signed statement confessing to the murder of Honey Garden."

After more than forty years in the priesthood there was little that could shake St. Brigid's snowy-haired pastor. However Madigan's news left him speechless for a moment.

"But you've already jailed Honey's husband for that!" he finally managed.

"We arrested the wrong man," Big Tom said. "Ring's confession clears Dave Garden, and the sooner he's released, the better I'm going to feel about it." He paused in front of a door. "Eddie's in here, Father, and he's not going to last much longer."

Nodding, Father Crumlish straightened his stooped shoulders and entered the room where Eddie Ring, age 33, oft-convicted petty thief and now a confessed murderer, lay on his deathbed. Ring's eyes were feverishly bright in his bloodless face and when he saw the priest seated by his side, his voice was ragged with urgency as he spoke.

"Father, I told the cops it was me who killed that woman. Not her husband—the guy they're holding. I didn't want to conk out knowing he was going to have to pay for what I did. But now I gotta confess—confess—" He broke off to gasp for breath.

"God's listening, Eddie," Father said.

"The Gardens live over that joint of theirs down on Canal Street—'The Garden Spot.' Last night I broke in, figuring they'd both be busy with the bar trade below. I nabbed two rings and a watch in the bedroom and then

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started going through the drawers in a desk in the living room. Just as I found a gun and picked it up, I heard her voice right behind me." Ring's pallor deepened as again he fought for breath.

"Easy, lad," Father murmured.

"I turned around. She saw her gun in my hand, but that didn't stop her. She came at me like a wildcat. We mixed it up, pretty rough—she fell—and then I got out fast." The dying man's eyes closed and for a moment Father thought he'd lost consciousness. But he opened his eyes again and went on.

"I heard on the midnight news that she'd been found beaten to death and I know"—again his voice faltered—"I know I did it. And then this morning, when I heard about her husband, I chickened out. Figured that if I could just get my hands on some quick cash I could skip town—" The pastor leaned closer in order to hear Ring's words. "I still had her gun—and that liquor store seemed like a sure thing—a real sure thing—" Abruptly his body sagged. Father Crumlish pressed the buzzer to summon aid. Then he knelt and prayed—and stayed—until the end.

Big Tom drove him back to the rectory. "I know you can't tell me anything Ring said to you, Father." (The policeman was referring to the Seal of Confession, whereby Father was bound by his vows never to divulge any information revealed to him during confession.) "But there are a few things I can tell you." He was silent as he expertly maneuvered the car around a corner and brought it to a halt at the curb in front of the rectory.

"The gun he was carrying for the Korman holdup was registered in Honey Garden's name," Madigan went on. "It's in the lab now, and we expect the report will show that Ring used it to crack her skull. That's what she died of, you know, a fractured skull. We searched his room and found two rings and a watch just where he said we would. So all that, plus his signed confession, means the case is closed." Big Tom couldn't conceal his expression of relief.

Father Crumlish had sat lost in thought and it was another several moments before he spoke. "Have you any idea what time it was when the poor woman was killed, Tom?"

Sometime between eight and ten, according to the M.E. Why, Father?"

"I'm not sure, mind you," Father said slowly, "but I've a vague notion that I caught a glimpse of Eddie during Devotions last night."

"Maybe he dropped in to try to ease his conscience," Madigan remarked dryly.

It wouldn't be the first time

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Eddie had done just that, the priest thought to himself. "Well, the poor fellow's made his peace with the Lord now," he said as he got out of the car. "Thanks for the lift, lad."

The following morning as Father Crumlish drained his breakfast cup of tea, Emma Catt, a grave-faced, gray-haired woman who had served as St. Brigid's cook-housekeeper for more than twenty-two years, plowed into the room, laid a stack of small white cards beside his saucer, and left.

Father eyed the stack with considerable apprehension. For the past two weeks he had been obliged to call his parishioners' attention to St. Brigid's hopelessly erratic furnace which he'd been warned would not last another winter. Since his people had trouble enough contributing to the regular collection baskets, the pastor knew they would be hard-pressed for any extra cash. Therefore he had suggested that they sign pledge cards, payable within a year, for whatever amount they felt they could spare.

So far the results had been disappointing, to say the least. Most of the pledges were for one or two dollars, or five at the most. And Father had the feeling that this latest batch—the results of his appeal made just before Devotions the night before last—would be for similar small amounts.

Now, as he picked up the cards and began to thumb through them, he saw that his apprehension was justified. Then suddenly his face brightened. A pledge for twenty-five dollars! Now who—? He glanced at the signature and his mouth fell open. It was signed by Eddie Ring.

So he'd been right, the priest told himself as he got up from the breakfast table and walked down the hall to his small shabby office. He *had* seen Eddie in church the night of Honey Garden's murder. But when? At what time exactly? Big Tom had said it was likely that the woman had died between eight and ten o'clock.

It had been exactly 7:45 p.m., Father recalled, just before he'd started Devotions, that he'd walked over to the altar railing, faced the congregation, and made his appeal. He'd told them that the pledge cards would be available, after Devotions, at a table set up in the rear of the church and presided over by Peter Burns, treasurer of the Holy Name Society. Then he'd gone about the Lord's work.

Eddie must have been in church at 7:45 p.m. and heard the appeal, Father now reasoned. And it had been at least ten o'clock before the last of the parishioners who had lined up around Peter Burns had departed. So if Eddie had been one of the first in line, he'd have had time to rob and

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beat Honey Garden. But if he'd been near the end of the line.

Father picked up the phone on his desk and dialed. "Peter," he said when Burns came on the wire, "I was wondering if you saw Eddie Ring the other night when he signed a pledge card."

"Sure, I saw him, Father."

"Do you remember what time it was when he signed? I mean was he among the first or—?"

"Gee, Father, there were a lot of people—I don't know if he was at the beginning, the middle, or the tail end of the line."

After expressing his thanks, the pastor hung up the phone. Then he sat for a long time fingering Eddie Ring's pledge card, a look of indecision on his face. Should he call Big Tom? he wondered. And if he did, what would he tell him? That he had some doubt in his mind that Eddie was a murderer? That he had a hunch that maybe—just maybe—Eddie had confessed to a crime he only thought he'd committed? That, despite all the evidence to the contrary, the dead man might have been innocent?

Finally Father Crumlish stood up. He'd decided that he didn't have enough information to call Madigan. But maybe if he made a few inquiries himself . . .

The flock that St. Brigid's pastor shepherded was a motley and bedraggled one. His parish, sprawling along Lake City's decaying waterfront section, was perpetually shrouded with grain dust from the mills, and soot and smoke that belched from the steel plant's open hearths. His people were plagued by degrading poverty —and worse. Because of their unsavory environment, immorality, violence and crime flourished. But the best of them and most of the worst had something in common: they feared God—and Father Crumlish.

"The Garden Spot" was a neon-rimmed tavern located midway on Canal Street, a garish strip of land which the priest thought of as "Satan's Alley." His archenemy, the Fiend, was so firmly entrenched there that Father, in his more pessimistic moments, despaired of ever dislodging him. Every time it was necessary for the pastor to visit the street, he experienced mixed feelings of compassion, frustration, and rage as he passed by the low-slung, dilapidated buildings which, he knew, harbored nearly every kind of avarice and evil known to mankind.

He was experiencing just such feelings now, in the late afternoon dusk, as he parked his car in front of The Garden Spot. Although most of his parishioners were under the impression that the place was owned by Dave Garden, Father Crumlish knew that it had been the sole property of Dave's murdered wife, Honey, a hard-

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headed ex-burlesque queen who had invested her life savings in the highly profitable establishment.

Getting out of his car, the priest noticed a side entrance to the building and assumed it led to the Garden's second-floor living quarters. But seeing a dim light inside the tavern, he decided to try his luck there first. He opened the door and stepped into the interior.

"Hold it, bud," a handsome blond giant of a man called out from behind the bar. "Not open yet."

"It's Father Crumlish."

"Oh! Sorry, Father," the man apologized. "C'mon in." Walking to the door, he closed it behind the pastor, took a key out of his pocket, and locked it.

Wordlessly Father Crumlish seated himself at an inconspicuous corner table and tried to place the large man's face, remember his name—and then he did. He was Stan Dulski, a bartender who had the reputation of never turning down a minor who had a little extra cash to pay for hard liquor. There was something else about the fellow that the priest had heard, some rumor. But for the moment it eluded him.

"How long have you been tending bar here, Stan?" Father asked.

"About a year, Father," Dulski said. He looked questioningly at the priest. "You want to see Dave?"

"Is he anywhere around?"

"Upstairs." Stan pointed a thumb toward the ceiling. "Poor guy's been sleeping since the cops sprung him early this morning. But I can wake him—"

"No, no," Father said hastily. "I'll just sit here, if you don't mind, and take my chances that he'll come down."

"Well, uh—" Dulski seemed to be disconcerted for a moment. "Then how about a beer while you're waiting, Father?"

Under normal circumstances the pastor would have declined. But the circumstances weren't normal. "A wee one would do no harm," he said, "Providing you join me." In a moment Stan brought two beers and sat down at the table.

"It was a terrible thing, what happened here," Father said, shaking his head. "I read in the paper that it was you who found the poor woman's body."

"Yeah!" Dulski poured beer into the two glasses. "It sure shook me up, Father."

"I can well imagine," the priest replied in a sympathetic tone. "Particularly with the police asking a lot of questions—"

The bartender's pale blue eyes turned cloudy. "I only told them the truth, Father," he said. "But it wouldn't surprise me none if Dave figures I'm the guy who fingered him to the cops."

Father Crumlish gazed at him with a look of astonishment. "Now

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what could you have told the police that would ever give Dave that notion?"

Stan hesitated a moment, then leaned across the table. "You understand, Father, I like Dave personally. He's a great guy and I wouldn't say anything on purpose to get him into trouble. Like I said, when the cops started shooting questions at me, all I did was tell the truth."

"You did the right thing," the pastor said, nodding.

"Everybody knew that Honey and Dave weren't getting along too good," Dulski continued. "When he had too many drinks he'd get mean, slap her around. Not out front here, of course." He waved a hand toward the rear of the room. "Out back—in the kitchen. And that's what he did the afternoon of the murder."

"And she stood for it?"

"Until about five thirty. Then she got sore at him and went upstairs—to their apartment. Dave hotfooted it up right after her and—wow!" Stan rolled his eyes. "Everybody in the joint could hear the fireworks."

"Then what?"

"Dave came back down here in about five minutes and said she'd locked herself in the john. And then he said—" He paused and gulped from his glass.

Father gave him a questioning look.

"—that when he got his hands on her he was going to kill her."

"He said that, did he?" The priest mused for a moment. "So everybody could hear?"

"Well, no," Stan said. "Just me."

"You two must be good friends," Father observed mildly.

"Sure! That's why, when he made that crack about croaking her, I tried to calm him down, get him to lay off the booze. Other times he'd listen to me. But not this time."

"So he went upstairs after her again, did he?"

"Not right away, Father. He sat here brooding until about eight. Then he went up, but he was back in about ten minutes and said that Honey still wouldn't see him. She'd locked herself in the john again." A frown creased Stan's handsome features. "My telling the cops that is what got them really steamed up, I guess."

"I see what you mean," the pastor said. "You must have heard about the medical report."

"Yeah! That Honey died sometime between eight and ten. So it sure looked like Dave was the last person to see her alive, didn't it?" He leaned back in his chair and sighed. "But of course he wasn't. It was Ring—the guy who confessed."

Father Crumlish made no comment as he stared thoughtfully at his still-full glass. "By the way," he finally said "how did it happen that you found her body?"

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Dulski sighed again. "When it got to be a little after ten and there was still no sign of her, I thought I'd take a run upstairs to see if I could get her to cool off. I started to knock on the door, but it was open an inch or so. I walked in and"—he gave the priest a bleak look—"and there she was."

"Now that Dave's in the clear," Father remarked after a few minutes, "I'd not worry that he'll hold you responsible for his arrest because of what you told the police."

"Maybe."

"It strikes me that you have a lot more to worry about, just working in this place."

"What do you mean, Father?"

"Surely it's crossed your mind that with all the liquor here, let alone that tempting cash register, you yourself could be held up, beaten, and robbed—or worse."

"Nah, Father. Not a chance."

"No? Ah! I suppose you keep some kind of weapon handy," Father said as if the thought had suddenly occurred to him. "Something to defend yourself with in an emergency."

Dulski chuckled. "Sure do. The best, in my racket. A length of iron pipe."

"Do you now!" The pastor was visibly impressed. "Would you let me take a look at the thing?"

"Funny you should ask," Stan replied, frowning. "I always kept it on the shelf under the bar. I started to show it to the cops when they asked the same question you just did—but it was gone."

"Disappeared?"

"Yep—into thin air, like."

"Now that's a strange thing," Father said. He would have continued to press the point but there was a sudden insistent knocking at the locked entrance door. Dulski got up, unlocked it, and admitted a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman in her late twenties. The priest recognized her as Ida Leone —and in the same instant he remembered the rumor about Stan Dulski that had eluded him earlier.

"Who are you locking out—the cops?" Ida asked sarcastically as she walked into the room. "Don't worry. Dave's free, and so are you—" She broke off abruptly and Father guessed that Dulski had flashed her a warning glance.

"How are you, Ida?" Father inquired as she swung around and caught sight of him. "Have you a minute to sit down?"

"Well—ah—sure, Father," Ida replied—rather reluctantly, the priest thought. He wondered if that had anything to do with what he had just remembered. And he decided to find out.

"Stan," he said, turning to the bartender, "do you suppose that I could have a word or two with Ida—in private?"

"Uh—yeah. Why not?" Stan said, but he appeared to be dis-

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tinctly unhappy about the situation as he disappeared into the kitchen. Ida seated herself opposite the pastor, fumbled in her purse, finally found a cigarette, and lit it. Watching her, Father noticed that there were dark shadows under her eyes, as if she'd endured too many sleepless nights, and that her mouth was set in sullen, tense lines. Under his scrutiny her pale face flushed.

"I—I suppose you think it's funny, Father, me working here after what happened," she said.

"Do you now?" Father replied tentatively, not sure he understood her meaning.

"I mean about Stan and me breaking up after going steady for nearly two years."

"I knew about that," the pastor acknowledged. There'd been a bit more to it than that, he'd heard —that Stan had thrown Ida over for another woman.

"I've got nobody to blame but myself," Ida said bitterly. "When Honey hired me as a waitress over a year ago, I thought I'd be doing myself and Stan a big favor if I could get him a job here too." She snorted. "Big joke on me."

"Joke?" Father asked. "How do you mean, lass?"

"Stan took one look at Honey and the money she was raking in here and figured he had it made." Ida puffed on her cigarette for a moment. "Would you believe it, Father," she said earnestly, "that Honey was so hooked on Stan she was going to divorce Dave?"

"Was she indeed?"

"That's what she had him thinking, anyway, And he sure acted as if he owned her—and this place too. That's why he went upstairs that night to talk to her—" Ida's voice came to a halt and she turned her head.

Father Crumlish looked at her speculatively. "You mean to say that Stan saw Honey the night she was killed? Before he found her body?"

Ida busied herself snuffing out her cigarette and lighting another.

Father had a sudden inspiration. "Maybe you saw him—when you yourself paid a call on Honey."

Ida's eyes flashed. "I had a right to know what was going on, didn't I?"

"And what time did you say this was?"

"I didn't—" she began, then shrugged. "I don't know exactly —around seven, seven thirty, I guess."

"Tell me," Father said, "why were you so set on seeing Honey?"

"Because I was fed up with all the hanky-panky going on around here—and I told her so." Ida's voice shook as she blurted out the words.

Was she lying? Father wondered. Out of spite against Stan, and Honey—and maybe, from the

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sour, angry look of her, against the whole world?

"I don't imagine you had a very warm welcome," the priest said lightly.

"Welcome—hah! She slammed the door in my face. But not before I saw that somebody had given her what was going to be a beautiful shiner."

Ida sniffed with what Father thought was almost an air of satisfaction. Hell hath no fury—he started to form the thought when a loud thud from the floor above interrupted him. He gave Ida an inquiring glance. "Would you say that maybe Dave's up and about?"

"I'd say so. You want to see him, Father?"

"I do." He stood up.

She pointed to a door next to the far end of the bar. "Through there and up the stairs."

Moments later, a trifle breathless from the climb, the pastor stood outside a spectacularly painted red-and-gold door. It was typical of the dead woman, Father knew. Big-boned, hard-eyed Honey Garden, whose given name had originally been Harriet, had always betrayed, by her deportment and dress, her almost fanatical fancy for fiery reds and brassy golds. Like all vain, self-centered women, she made every effort to attract attention to herself and invariably she succeeded. Even in the way in which she had died, Father Crumlish thought as he pressed the doorbell.

"Who's there?" a hoarse voice called from behind the door.

"Father Crumlish."

It was a second or two before the door swung open, revealing a potbellied man whose original good looks had receded faster than the hairline of his bald head.

"C'mon in, Father," Dave Garden said as he clutched his coffee-stained bathrobe around him. "Make yourself at home while I get into a shirt and pants."

"Take your time, Dave," Father said as he walked into the living room. "I'm in no hurry." As a matter of fact, he was glad to be left alone so that he could take a closer, and almost incredulous, look at his surroundings. Never in his life had he seen anything comparable. As if the red-and-gold motif and furnishings of the room weren't dazzling enough, Honey had covered virtually every square inch of wall space with some likeness of herself.

Father Crumlish gazed on row after row of charcoal sketches, pen-and-ink drawings, portraits in oils—all of Honey, and all highly flattering. What a pretty price she must have paid the artists to make her appear so attractively slim and youthful, the pastor thought as he paused to look at a palette-knife portrait over the fireplace, a bronze bust on the bookcase, and a copper plaque

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with her profile in bas relief. What a pretty price indeed! His thoughts were interrupted by the reappearance of Dave Garden.

"Honey was really something, wasn't she, Father?" Dave said, shaking his head mournfully. "Poor kid. When I think of that —that guy Ring, beating her up—" His voice trailed away as he slumped into a chair, clenching his fists.

"You've had a bad time, Dave," Father said. "It was hard enough, about Honey. But then you had the added ordeal of the police arresting you."

"How do you like that, Father? The cops trying to pin my wife's murder on me!"

"I suppose they thought you had a reason."

"Reason! What reason would *I* have?" He made a gesture.

"After they heard that you'd been drinking all afternoon and bickering—"

"'Heard' is right," Garden said angrily as he straightened up in his chair. "What they heard was a lot of insinuations from that pretty-faced bartender. The first thing I do when I get squared away around here is toss him out on his—"

"Well now," the pastor said in a reasonable tone of voice, "wasn't it his duty to tell the police that, to the best of his knowledge, you were the last person to see Honey alive?"

Garden sat thoughtfully for a moment before, grudgingly, nodding in agreement. "I suppose you're right, Father. It was no secret that Honey and I were having an—ah—argument all afternoon. Or that she really got sore at me, around five thirty, and came up here."

"What provoked the argument?"

Garden shrugged. "I'd been drinking, and I guess I said some things in anger that I—" He chewed his lower lip and stared gloomily at the floor.

Father eyed him quizzically, wondering if a man who could be driven so easily to speak in anger might also be driven in anger to act.

"I came up after her," Dave continued. "Thought maybe we could patch things up. But she wasn't having any of it. She locked herself in the bathroom and—and that's the last time I saw her alive."

The priest looked puzzled. "But I had an idea you came up here again—about eight o'clock, wasn't it?"

Dave nodded. "But the minute she heard me come in she ducked back into the bathroom and locked the door. I begged her to come out—told her I was sorry—" He buried his dissipated face in his hands.

Father Crumlish gave him a long searching look before he stood up. He walked to the door

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and then turned. "You'll not be vindictive now, will you, Dave?" he asked.

Garden hesitated, then sighed heavily. "Right now all I want to do is just forget—everything."

"I don't blame you," Father said. He gave one last wondering look around the room laden with the flattering likeness of Honey Garden. "I don't blame you at all."

It was past eleven before Father Crumlish managed to tuck himself under his cozy comforter, turn his bedside radio on low, and pick up the volume containing the story of Edgar Allan Poe that he had been in the midst of reading last night. But he found it difficult to concentrate; his mind persisted in wandering . . .

What he had seen and heard this day had heightened his uneasy feeling that Eddie Ring was innocent of the crime to which he had confessed. And Father was reasonably certain that one of the three he had talked to—Stan, Ida, or Dave—had been lying. But which one? And how could he prove it? He sighed and shook his head in frustration.

Well, he told himself, resolutely turning his attention back to the Poe story, there was nothing more to be done about it tonight in any event . . .

A few minutes later, the pastor suddenly sat straight up in bed and let the volume slip from his fingers. "Glory be to God!" he exclaimed, his brain working so busily that he failed to hear the sportscaster on the radio raucously proclaiming that Willie Mays had just clouted a monstrous long home run to win the game for the Giants in the bottom of the tenth.

Satisfied that he now had the answer, Father Crumlish picked up the phone and dialed Big Tom Madigan's number.

Close to noon the following morning Madigan rang the doorbell of St. Brigid's rectory and was admitted by Emma Catt. He joined the pastor in the living room, sank into a chair, and ran a hand wearily through his crisp, curly brown hair.

"You were right, Father," he said "We picked up that bronze bust of Honey from the bookcase in the Gardens' living room. It had been wiped clean—no prints, hair, anything like that; still our lab boys were able to detect traces of blood, which matched Honey's type. When we confronted Dave with that, he broke down and confessed he killed her—"

"May God have mercy on him," Father murmured.

"That was the second time he went up there—around eight. Eddie Ring had already been and gone. Dave accused her of planning to sell The Garden Spot and team up with Stan Dulski.

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She admitted it, taunted him, and he became so enraged that he picked up the bust and cracked her skull."

"Poor Eddie," Father said. "An awful thing it was, his dying in the belief that he'd murdered the woman."

"But it's easy to see why he thought so. After all, he'd hit her hard, knocked her flat, given her some nasty bruises—including a black eye So when he heard the news bulletin—that she was dead—he naturally jumped to the conclusion that he was responsible He had no way of knowing that the blow that really killed her was struck with the bust." Madigan took time out to light a cigarette.

"Her own likeness, lad," Father said.

"Yeah." The policeman smiled wryly. "Ironic, isn't it? But then, this whole case has been kind of wild. First of all"—he leaned forward in his chair, ticking off the points on his fingers—"we arrest a man for murder in what we think is an airtight case. Then—boom! Another man confesses to the crime, so we release the first suspect. And who does it turn out *really* did it?"

"What was the word you used, lad?" Father said with a trace of a smile. "Wild?" As Madigan nodded, the priest's face grew serious again. "There are a few things still troubling me, Tom."

"What, Father?"

"Why do you suppose that Honey didn't call the police after Eddie attacked and robbed her?"

Big Tom smiled knowingly. "When you run a joint like hers you don't invite the cops to come nosing around."

"I suppose not," the pastor agreed. "But then tell me, when you arrested Dave the first time, what kind of weapon did you think he'd used to kill her with?"

"We weren't sure. Never occurred to us it could be the bronze bust—that seemed to us to be"—he shrugged—"just like another piece of furniture. We had a hunch it might have been that missing length of iron pipe that Stan kept behind the bar."

Father sat thoughtfully for a moment. "What do you think happened to it?" he asked.

Madigan chuckled. "Ida Leone admitted this morning that she hid it, hoping we'd suspect Dulski. You know what they say about a woman scorned, don't you, Father?"

The priest looked grim. "I do indeed. And I mean to have a word with that lass. I've a notion that, with the good Lord's help, she'll mend her ways." He gave Madigan a sharp glance. "It would do no harm if you kept an eye on Stan Dulski, too, Tom."

"Anything you say." Madigan grinned. "Now would you mind telling *me* something, Father?"

"What's that, Tom?"

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"Why were you so sure Eddie Ring was innocent?"

"If I'd been really sure, if I'd had any proof, I'd have come to you with it—surely you know that. But all I had was a hunch, after I remembered seeing poor Eddie in church during Devotions that night, and then coming across the pledge card he'd signed. I couldn't bear the thought that he'd gone to meet his Maker with that terrible deed on his conscience, if he didn't really do it."

Big Tom Madigan's warm brown eyes were warmer than usual as he gazed at his pastor. "One more question, Father," he said. "How did you know the fatal weapon was that bust of Honey Garden?"

It was Father Crumlish's turn to chuckle with amusement. "Well, now—in a way, you might say that I was tipped off"

"No kidding? Who tipped you?"

"An old friend of mine—by the name of Edgar Allan Poe."

The detective looked at him blankly for a moment. "You're not talking about the famous author?"

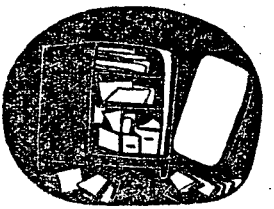
The priest nodded. "The very same," he said. "Tell me, lad, did you ever read a story of his called *The Purloined Letter?*"

"I've heard of it, but—" Madigan reflected for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't recall ever reading it."

"You should, Tom, you should." Father wagged a gently admonishing finger at him. "Because it teaches a lesson every policeman ought to keep in mind."

"What's that, Father?"

"Just this, lad: if you want to hide something, the best place for it is right out in plain sight, where people see it all the time—where they *expect* to see it."



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 330th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Yes, it is stretching the form to call these three sonnets a "first story"—but as the first-published work of a new writer they are much too good to be passed by because of a technicality of definition . . .

The author, Laurel Anne McVicker (Mrs. Ned S. Goss), "wrote copiously during school and college"—up to the time she was graduated from Smith where she was given "a sort of most-likely-to-succeed-in-writing award, and then proceeded never to write another line." She has an M.A. in psychology from Columbia, and has worked as a clinical psychologist in a number of public agencies and institutions. During World War II she was a psychologist for the Air Force in various parts of the United States, and then, as "a Red Cross girl," went to India where she met her husband. The Gosses have one son and one daughter in college, another son in his senior year of high school (at the time of this writing), and another daughter in elementary school. No wonder Mrs. Goss hasn't had time "to write another line"!

But we have reason to believe there will be more 'tec-acrostics . . .

ACROSTECS

by LAUREL ANNE McVICKER

Man's weaknesses — the fears that lurk below —
In wider fields lie shrouded and obscure.
She sees man's motives carved in cameo,
St. Mary Mead the world in miniature.

Jealousy, greed, the lusts that nurture crime
Abound at garden party, church bazaar,
No maid too lowly, squire too sublime —
Each has his motives, baronet to char.

© *1969 by Laurel Anne McVicker.*

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Murders that mystify from Yard to bobby
Are gently, deftly, by her hands unwound.
Remember — Human Nature is her hobby,
People the same wherever they be found.
Long may they bloom, in shire that is calm and shady,
English crime, and the English gentlelady.

Magnificent mustache his splendid banner,

His foe the bringer of mysterious death;
Elegant egoist, Continental manner,
Reason and symmetry his shibboleth.
Consider, he says, the victim's characteristics,
Uncovered motives, facts in logical grain.
Little gray cells more potent than ballistics,
Egg-shaped head encasing a Master's brain.

Peace may tempt him — the chance to leave behind
Outrageous fortune, with its slings and arrows.
If murder strikes, though, can he ever find
Retirement, in a world of vegetable marrows.
Old age thus far has honed, not dulled, the sabers
That arm him for his herculean labors.

Ackroyd the first on her long, long road to glory —
Give her homage, as characters fall in line;
Acknowledge her queen of the great detective story.
Tommy and Tuppence, Mr. Parker Pyne,
Harley Quin at the sleeve of Satterthwaite,
Aunt Jane shedding her light on the human condition,

Cocksure Belgian, with wits that penetrate,
Hastings at hand to chronicle his mission:
Ranging the world, her sleuths pursue their path
In London taxi or Orient Express,
Stamboul to Sussex, Brindisi to Beirut to Bath,
Tracing the truth with their old unmatched finesse.
Imitated, unequaled, dean of dazzling detection:
Enigmas solved with Christie-lin clear perfection.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 331st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine...."first stories" are rarely code stories (although there seems to have been a revival these past two years—Alan K. Young's "Letter from Mindoro," in the March 1968 issue of EQMM, was also a "code-first"); and this new one has a charming and clever basis for a baffling secret message...

The author, John Abbott, is in his early forties. He told us that he has been "a victim of the writing bug for six years," and has "the varied background to draw on for idea material—farming, warehousing, civil service, floorwalking, catering, etc." He told us something else—something that always pleases us. EQMM's purchase of Mr. Abbott's "first story" has made him "a permanent resident of Cloud 9."

We hope Mr. Abbott will begin drawing on his varied background—as we have said so often, there are no better plots than those which come directly out of real-life experiences...

THE JUMP-WHISKEY CODE

by JOHN ABBOTT

EDWARD BRADY SLUMPED IN A chair, watching the Chief of Intelligence through half-shuttered eyes. But his mind was whirling with curiosity. An urgent summons to return from vacation was not standard procedure; this had to be something big.

The Chief was pacing a furrow in the nap of the rug. He stopped suddenly and produced an envelope from his jacket pocket.

"This came in the morning mail, addressed to the department, special attention of you, Edward. Normally we wouldn't have opened it but someone recognized the handwriting on the envelope as Lundy's, so of course we couldn't wait for you to get back."

Brady sat up. "No, sir."

"It was like a voice from the

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grave for, as you know, Lundy was killed yesterday. He and Fred Bemis were on a surveillance stakeout of a leftist group that has been promising trouble during the visit of Crown Prince Hako this afternoon. Are you familiar with the group?"

Brady was. The World Peace Seekers (WPS), while promulgating peace via pamphlets and rallies, had an anonymous hand in the riots and draft-card burnings which had mushroomed "spontaneously" in the capital.

"Chief, I can't understand why Lundy should have written to me."

"Neither can we. But that is only part of the mystery. We have a good code here at Intelligence and Lundy knows that code. Yet he didn't use it. Instead, he used a new one that no one here can break. We thought maybe you two had been experimenting and this was a private code the two of you had invented."

Brady shook his head.

"Then it doesn't make any sense. Of course you're our top code man, no question about that. We all admire your attention to detail, your intuitive grasp of structural formations. That could be why Lundy thought of writing to you. But why a *new* code? Why didn't he use our current code?"

Brady shrugged. "May I see the message?" He came around the desk and read the neatly typed sheet:

JUMP-WHISKEY

cail

egbk snwl

rimi

ufol

esyh stbl

kena

atik

msto

The Chief watched Brady anxiously. "We feel it was meant to tell us something about the visit of Prince Hako. Lundy would not send a frivolous message while on duty."

Brady agreed. "This is a carbon copy, sir. Where is the original?"

"Don't know. Perhaps the killer took it."

"Without knowing that Lundy mailed us a copy?"

"Right. There's a mail chute in the corridor just outside the apartment Lundy and Bemis were operating from. Which means that whoever killed him will be proceeding with the plan against Hako. Now do you see why we want this message broken as soon as possible?"

Brady nodded. He was rising to the challenge—the appearance of a new code always brought on this tingling excitement. He had felt it first as a schoolboy while reading Edgar Allan Poe's *The Gold-Bug*. He was fascinated with

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the mechanics of codebusting, with looking for and finding the elusive key which transformed a jumble of letters or symbols into a lucid, meaningful message.

Brady stared at the sheet as the Chief briefed him on what had happened. Posing as students, Lundy and Bemis had rented a basement apartment in the building where the WPS held meetings in a third-floor apartment. Lundy had bugged the pay telephone in the lobby and they were tape-recording all calls, hoping to get a lead on the trouble being fomented. Bemis was on the set from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. and then Lundy took over. Bemis reported that yesterday Lundy asked him to bring some coffee from the nearby cafeteria before going home to sleep and when Bemis returned, poor Lundy had been shot—once, behind the right ear.

Brady looked up. "A silencer?"

"Yes. It was no amateur's work."

"You think the WPS got wind of something?"

"Doesn't it seem likely?"

Brady held up the coded sheet. "I'll need some time on this."

"You can't have it." The Chief had a positive way of being negative. "Time is our enemy, their ally. You have to bust this code before three p.m., Mr. Brady."

Brady moved to the door. "I'll try." Things were grim whenever the Chief called him Mister...

In the quiet of his office Brady attacked the code. He believed there were two keys to its solution: the arrangement of the letters and the capitalized words at the top—JUMP-WHISKEY. An hour later he had filled two scratchpads, blunted three pencils, and had the uneasy feeling he was not going to make the deadline.

He rang the Chief.

"Mr. Brady? What news?"

Briefly he explained his theories.

"But where does that leave us?"

"A little closer, sir. Look, I'd appreciate the address of the apartment house that Lundy and Bemis were working in. I'd like to go there and look around a bit. I'll be careful, don't worry. They say a man's environment influences his thinking. Maybe I can get the feel of the atmosphere that Lundy was exposed to when he devised that code. Permission granted?"

"All right, go ahead. But remember the deadline, Mr. Brady."

In the front hallway of the apartment house several odors fought for dominance—and boiled cabbage was a thin winner. The woman who answered his ring kept her arms crossed in front of her as if not trusting the bathrobe to conceal her abundant charms. "We got no rooms for rent. Mebbe next Monday."

Outside he looked up at the building dolefully, as if unwilling to leave without receiving some sort of message.

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"Hey!"

He turned and half tumbled, half sprawled over someone directly beneath him. A little girl, hat askew, looked up reproachfully, waving a piece of chalk at him like a baton.

"You big stupid! Why don't you look where you're goin'?"

"Sorry."

"Well, stay off my drawings. What do you want, the whole sidewalk?"

Two women passing by giggled as Brady groped for his dropped notebook and retrieved it, elaborately avoiding the white-on-gray artwork. He carefully stepped through a series of squares the girl had drawn on the sidewalk and when he looked back at the corner she was hopping through them on one foot.

The Chief was pumping Brady's hand before the codebuster was fully seated. "Now you don't have to tell me, Edward. I can tell by the expression on your face. Positively beatific."

"Well, I had help, sir."

The Chief was beaming, too. "Tell, tell."

"Your first question," Brady began, "was why Lundy had to improvise a code at all. He knew the agents of WPS were unfamiliar with our current code. So it must have been someone else Lundy wanted to keep in the dark as to the contents of that letter. Obviously, the only one close to him on the case—Bemis.

"This is probably what happened. Bemis goes to the cafeteria for coffee. Lundy intercepts a call to the WPS in which Bemis' name is mentioned. Now Bemis is not a very common name, so Lundy immediately suspects that Bemis is involved in the WPS network—that Bemis is a double agent. Details of the plot against Prince Hako are also mentioned.

"Lundy begins to think furiously. He wants us to have the details of the plot and he also wants to test Bemis, to give him a chance to incriminate himself. Lundy can't call Headquarters—WPS may intercept his call, come down, and silence him. So he works out a quick new code, types out the message to us, then drops the carbon in the mail chute just outside the apartment. I think he was going to give the original to Bemis, to see if he would bring it here.

"Bemis returns from the cafeteria and is probably alerted by someone on the third floor that a call came through mentioning him by name. He goes into the basement apartment and shoots Lundy. Searching the body, he finds the original of the message. He must have been puzzled when he could not break it by applying our regular department code."

"But you broke it, Edward."

"Yes, with luck. Remember that

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I told you the arrangement of the letters was significant? Why were they not all side by side, as in other messages? It seemed that, in addition to saying something, they were arranged to represent some familiar form or shape. And the two capitalized words at the top—JUMP-WHISKEY. They were in English, not in code. I felt they served as the title and key to the whole structure.

"So I began the usual elimination of synonyms, antonyms, and so on, but it wasn't until I tripped over that little girl and saw her group of squares—as Lundy must have seen them going to work—that the whole thing jelled into one pattern."

"Which was?"

Brady smiled. "Jump-Whiskey translates to Hop-Scotch."

The Chief groaned.

"In one form of the game of hopscotch you begin at the bottom square and hop up, going from left to right when there are two squares on the sides. I did this beginning with the bottom-left letter of Lundy's message, moved up, then crossed left to right, then up again, and it began to unravel. At the top I reversed the process until I had this message:

make sure scan gift sets
tiny bomb will kill hako

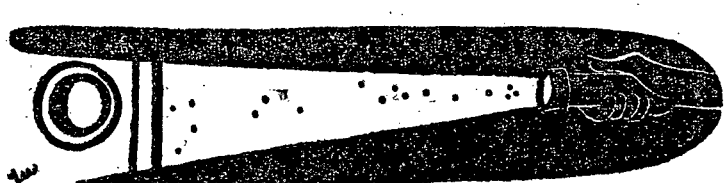
The Chief pushed buttons on his intercom; from behind Brady three people entered on the trot—a secretary and two men from the Tactical Squad.

"Bring in Agent Bemis and—yes, Edward?"

"Merely a suggestion, Chief. You might have all the gifts for Crown Prince Hako placed in an isolated spot under the close security guard of Bemis himself. I'm sure that just before three p.m. he'll be most happy to point out which one would best serve the interests of our country while reposing under water."

"Very good, Edward. Anything else?"

"Yes. Your secretary might prepare the papers for your signature—extending my interrupted vacation."



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We have a confession to make about Elliot L. Gilbert's "Link in the Chain." The first time we read the story—in manuscript—we missed the point, we failed to see the true meaning of Mr. Gilbert's story. If you wish to consider our obtuseness a warning, then beware . . .

LINK IN THE CHAIN

by ELLIOT L. GILBERT

THE SQUAT MAN PARTED SHEAVES of tall brittle dune grass to get a better look. Not far below him and to the left on a flat projecting mesa of rock lightly drifted with sand, an umbrella, a square table, and a chair had been set up. The stick of the umbrella was fitted into a crack in the rock, and the big striped hoop spoke with a mutter of heavy canvas in the gusty wind. Occasionally a breeze lifted the skirts of the tablecloth, anchored with four heavy stones at the four corners, but did not disturb the half-filled glass that stood on the table or the expensive-looking wicker hamper that rested beside it in the powdery sand.

From where the squat, balding onlooker crouched behind the dry clumps of grass, very little of the canvas beach chair could be seen extending beyond the rim of the umbrella. No one, for example, walking on the road a hundred yards still farther up the sloping side of the dune, could be certain that anyone was sitting in the chair or, indeed, that there was a chair behind the umbrella at all. This fact suited the watcher's plans exactly, but his face showed neither satisfaction nor relief. He simply remained, without moving, in the same position, watching the little improvised terrace from behind the prickly dune grass.

The chair was, indeed, empty. For ten minutes more there was no change in the scene. The continual roar of the surf drifted up from below, and even under the hot sun the onlooker was chilled by the pungent salt wind blowing fitfully in from the sea.

The new sound was, at first, hardly a sound at all, only a rhythm different from the rhythm of the sea and the wind; but the impassiveness of the watcher in the grass suddenly took on, without any par-

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ticular change in the man's position or features, a curious intensity. Soon the new rhythm had resolved itself into footsteps coming slowly up the rocky slope and a moment later a man's bald head appeared over the rim of the terrace followed by a short khaki-robed body.

The second man was breathing hard and sweating freely. He went right to the wicker hamper, rummaged in it for a minute, and finally came up clutching a tall can which he expertly popped open. Before drinking, however, he carefully surveyed the grassy hill that reached from his umbrella and chair to the road above. Then, having completed his examination, he returned to the far rim of the terrace and, between long swallows of beer, stared down the steep path he had just climbed.

The man hidden in the dune grass watched these movements with professional interest. He noted the broad back draped in khaki terrycloth, and the bald head set on a roll of flesh that thickened each time the head tilted back to receive more beer. What the onlooker saw seemed to satisfy him. The slick glistening head, the squat body, the nondescript features—they were precisely what he had expected.

In no other way, he knew, could the man before him have survived all these years with half a dozen clever and ambitious assassins scouring the world for him. Only by having a face that people quickly forgot, only by looking like so many others could he have managed to live this long. The man hidden in the grass, himself squat and balding and unmemorable, knew this from his own experience and admired the khaki-robed man for knowing it.

His admiration, however, was not personal. He knew, too, that the man's luck had now run out. Moreover it pleased him to think that of all those clever and ambitious hunters who had searched for the fugitive for so long (on how many continents were they now scattered, quite unknown to one another?), it was he, also a man who looked like so many others, a man with a face that seemed to become invisible as you watched it—it was he who had finally caught up with him.

Below on the terrace the squat man drank the last of the beer and threw the can away, listening to it clatter for some time down the rocky slope. Then he moved to the beach chair and straddled it for a moment before lowering his bulk awkwardly into the worn canvas. In this position, facing the sea and with the umbrella at his back, he was entirely concealed from the road and from the man who crouched above and behind him in the grass.

Five minutes passed, the sea roaring and the wind sighing, before the concealed man rose silently. He was himself dressed for the

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beach, his short ungainly body wrapped in a brown robe. He glanced first up the slope and then down to the shore and, seeing no one, turned his attention again to the umbrella. Nothing moved. Slowly, but with surprising grace, he went down to the terrace.

He did not pause. One of the four corners of the table projected slightly behind the umbrella, and the rock that held down the cloth at that corner was heavy and jagged. He picked the rock up in his right hand and without hesitating walked around to the front of the umbrella.

"Mr. Salmaggi?" His voice was dry and toneless.

Surprised and glistening with sweat, the bald head turned to meet the deadly downward rush of the heavy stone.

The blow was struck efficiently, none of the energy being deflected by the hard bones of the skull. Instead, the left side of the hairless head, absorbing the full force of the clubbing, sank inward with a curious hollow ease that communicated itself through the stone and up the length of the murderer's arm. Instantly the khaki-robed body sagged in its canvas sling, all vitality drained from it in a moment. A muscle in the calf twitched once, and the left nostril blew a grotesque, pink mucous bubble which broke with a sigh. Then the man in the beach chair lay still.

The killer was obviously pleased with his performance. He glanced again up toward the road and down to the water, but there had been no witness. The only sounds were still the steady boom of the umbrella in the sea breeze and the distant roar of the surf. Coolly he reached into the folds of the khaki robe, put three fingers over the dead man's heart and held them there for as long as it took to count to one hundred. Then, when he was completely satisfied, he took the stone, still gripped in his right hand, to the edge of the terrace and rubbed it vigorously in the sand for a minute before returning it to its place at the fourth corner of the table. There, with the other three rocks, it once more completed the square.

All these actions were taken unhurriedly and gave the impression of having been carefully planned. Now the killer returned to the beach chair and after a moment of reflection knelt down beside it, reaching across the body, taking hold of the farther arm near the elbow and pulling and lifting the limp form at the same time.

Reluctantly the body swung around, the broken head flopping ludicrously forward, as the murderer searched with his shoulder for a point of balance in the flabby midsection. Finding it, he staggered up, bringing the dead weight with him, shuffled the few feet to the rim of the terrace, gathered

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himself, and, with a final effort flung the body over the edge.

It feel freely for a dozen yards before a sharp spur of rock caught it under one arm and spun it wildly, the khaki robe ballooning to reveal pasty flesh and a purple bathing suit. Then, nearly two hundred feet below, it came abruptly to a stop, crumpled in a hollow where beer cans glittered among the crags.

The man in the brown robe peered at the body far below with approval. There would be no need, after all, to follow it down and make adjustments; its position would satisfactorily account for its wound. Those immediately concerned with the dead man would not, of course, suppose that he had had an accident. Indeed, it was in the killer's own interest that his efficient work should be known in the right quarters, for what it was. On the other hand, it would be foolish to trouble local officials unnecessarily with matters which were none of their concern. Now, not even the most conscientious of policemen would have cause to be suspicious about this regrettable incident.

Turning from the edge of the terrace, the man in the brown robe was surprised to find that he had not yet caught his breath. The events of the past half hour had, it seemed, required a greater expenditure of energy than he had expected. Sweat ran down his body under his robe, and his balding head with its small fringe of hair, was unpleasantly damp.

In the wicker hamper he found another can of beer, opened it, and took a long drink. After another few minutes, he thought, blotting the top of his head with a sleeve, he would pick his way down the steep path to the beach. Then he would stroll eastward along the curve of the shore until he reached the big hotel where he had left his clothes and his car.

He swallowed more beer, tilting his head back and squinting at the sky over the rim of the can. Still tired, he wondered if he ought to relax for a short time in the beach chair. Even if someone should suddenly come walking along the shore and glance up and see him sitting there, drinking beer, he would be perfectly safe. With his balding head, his squat body, his face that looked like so many other faces, he would attract no attention. He would just be a little balding man sitting on a hill drinking beer.

Idly now he glanced out to sea, fancying the fish under the waves eating and being eaten every minute. The thought of the endless chain of passionless murders amused him. He looked over the edge of the terrace again to check the position of his own victim, and as he did so, he brought one hand up quickly to shade his eyes. For where at first there had appeared to be only one body it seemed to

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him now that there were two squat balding men, the second body a replica of himself or of the man he had just killed, both bodies lying on the rocks below.

He breathed deeply, blinked, and looked again; but the second corpse persisted. In its earth-colored robe it had somehow escaped his notice before—but it was undoubtedly there, sprawling brokenly in the sun, and it could not be ignored. What, he wondered nervously, has been going on here this afternoon?

His mind raced. Below him the two bodies blended into the background like anonymous victims or nearly invisible assassins. Indeed, it was impossible, he realized with a pang, to tell the difference, disturbingly easy to mistake victim for assassin. What if he himself had been called upon to make such a distinction? Might he not well have failed the test? Might not anyone?

Now thoroughly alarmed, he took a last quick drink and, turning hastily to go, set the beer can down in the precise middle of the triangle formed by the three rocks on the table.

His hand froze. Too late, he understood. A link in the chain.

"Mr. Salmaggi?" The dry, toneless voice spoke very close to his ear.

EDITORS' NOTE: *The reason we first failed to see Mr. Gilbert's provocative and disturbing point is easily, though shamefacedly, explained . . . When we read that the murderer looked over the edge of the terrace and saw two bodies, we interpreted the second corpse as an illusion or hallucination—a case of "double vision." But that was not what the author had said at all. There* were *two bodies, both nondescript, each indistinguishable from the other. Then we realized the true potential of Mr. Gilbert's title—"Link in the Chain." Terrifying thought, isn't it? Suppose neither of the two bodies below the terrace is Mr. Salmaggi? And even more terrifying, suppose the chain is endless, the number of links infinite?*

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a *NEW* detective story by

RHONA PETRIE

Another case about Larry Moss, insurance investigator ... Moss sees it and tells it like it is: he's not paid, he reminds us, for pity. "Insurance has a compassionate face when it takes your business; but it runs the cold eye of calculation over you when you are in need." And Larry Moss was part of that cold eye.

An unusual and interesting case .... "Nearly everyone has an Achilles heel, one little giveaway clue." Join Larry Moss on the trail of the Achilles heel ...

PART OF THAT COLD EYE

by RHONA PETRIE

IT HAD RAINED ALL THROUGH SATurday and Sunday with deadly East London persistence.

There are ways of spending a week-end so that Noah's flood could pass unnoticed, but I'd been on a job, assigned to an outdoor vigil in blustery doorways, under the imagined shelter of high grimed walls, with hectic dashes to my hidden car through pitch-black alleys flooded from overburdened gutters, and no other human life observable but hunched shapes in slithering taxis or shadows on a blind or drunks' voices raised in bawdy, wordless song in some late-lit pub.

It was still raining on Monday, and I wasn't singing in it. Even the way life came back to the greasy Thames did nothing to relieve the scene's dank gloom. Lock-gates, jetties, warehouses oozed sooty secretions. Dockland's cranes, after the stiff off-duty rigor, had bowed again under the double burden of weekday drudgery and sodden clouds. All life was reduced to a gray lump of wet felt. And that went for me too.

I'd phoned in my last report at 6:15 A.M. Hardy would have been in bed to receive it, drowsily warm though still dyspeptic, still umbilically attached to his inescapable

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phone. And he told me what I'd known in my bones for ten hours: my fox wasn't holed up at all. They'd picked him up at Gatwick airport two hours back, the goods on him. Nothing left now but to envy the well-nourished operative who'd collected him in dry, civilized comfort.

I'd sneezed myself back into the small black car. I could smell myself steaming like an old, unhealthy blanketed dog. Upriver then, by dockland's narrow, winding ways, with occasional glimpses of black and oily water, the graystone Tower sullenly hunched over Traitor's Gate, brooding on the soup-kitchen sins of waking Bermondsey across the Thames.

My body itched. I could get a hot bath at Waterloo Station.

I felt like a new man, slung down my canvas bag, and stepped onto the weighing machine, just checking that Larry Moss hadn't gathered any avoirdupois. The arrow swung over the dial, the mechanism clunked. Out fell a little ticket freshly stamped *156 lbs.* I turned it over. Prestamped on the other side was my character reading and fortune. I was, it told me, cautious, conventional, inclined to shy at obstacles, a little too anxious to please. Indeed? So I *was* a new man.

And then, reflected in the glass dial facing me, I recognized a woman. It was not so much her face, for she was past me in an instant, or even her figure which was as good as a top London model's. It was certainly not the jauntiness with which she moved that recalled the last—the only other—time I'd seen her. But I'm seldom wrong on this instant-recognition bit, and the possibility had me intrigued.

I stood and watched while the pastel mink receded, high-heeled crocodile pumps (to match her suitcase) tapping across the flagstones. Madame, it seemed, could also be bound for a bath.

The next ten empty minutes confirmed the guess, so I went for a newspaper, then settled myself with it and a large currant-dotted mass of carbohydrate beyond a mobile tea dispenser. Eventually Madame reappeared. Madame too was a new woman.

In unremarkable raincoat and scarf she wandered to the weighing machine, rooted for change in her cheap little handbag, dropped the suitcase, now completely hidden by a drab plastic zip-cover, and stepped on, poking the penny awkwardly into the slot. I saw the arrow move to the vicinity of 130 pounds and wondered what fate had provided on the reverse side of the card. Perhaps, though, all the tickets were a job lot and she too was written off as "cautious, conventional, inclined to shy at obstacles, a little too anxious to please." Certainly the description

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seemed to fit her as she stood there, bowed and careful, like a butterfly—on a reversed film—gone back to chrysalis.

Into her plastic handbag went the weight card. There too, at the Left Luggage counter, went the receipt for her suitcase. (Pastel mink, crocodile skin, and, no doubt, a mind-boggling trousseau of flimsies!) I followed her into the Underground and saw which machine she took her ticket from.

Mrs. Moura Rattigan was returning home.

There was no need for me to follow. I knew her address, had been there only a week before. She had been the subject of an investigation. Life insurance on her husband.

I used the car to cross the river, then abandoned it near the Embankment, and slipped up to Lyons Corner House for breakfast. All the time I was thinking about Moura Rattigan and the use she had made of Waterloo Station. I stirred my coffee and saw her again as she'd been pointed out to me last week a couple of streets from her home. I got right back into myself as I was then and let it happen over again ...

She was all in black, and briefly the mass of unrelieved dark had me fooled. Black does that often to a man, simplifies the outline, but I'm supposed to know better. On second blink I saw the gear wasn't that good, just cheap-smart. Ritziness that went less than skin-deep; straight lines cut for economy, not elegance.

This was the right place for it, of course, in the chaos of crooked back streets roughly a mile north of London's Mansion House. Half the Dickensian alley I stood in was being pulled down. The other half was shored up at one end in a dispirited way with wooden beams akimbo. The only buildings that looked permanent here were the blank-faced garment-factory walls. It would take more than meetings of the City Fathers to budge them. They were long ago spawned of cheap labor by foreign textile dumpers and smalltime skimpers. The grimed cubes of warehouses wedged between them were crammed with the recent vulture-pickings of bankruptcy, arson, or straightforward theft. Crate upon crate of shoddy underwear, mass-produced dressing gowns, dresses, coats, and suits, all with minimum seam allowance, ready to burst at second wearing; glitter fit to tarnish, fallals and fake furs; eye-catching, penny-snatching, expendable junk.

The bitter wind that scoured the street from the east bore a cloud of tiny hard objects with it, grit and soot mixed with the occasional bouncing hailstone. Hard on the eye, this district; harder on the heart, if you owned to having one.

The woman crossed the street toward my corner, teetered as her

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stilt heels encountered the uneven cobbles. Then she waited, hunched, while a bulky truck reversed from a courtyard. She clutched at her black collar and shrank into it, screwing her face into an anonymity of lines that signified only coldness, aloneness, perhaps even despair.

I'm not paid for pity. Insurance has a compassionate face when it takes your business; but it runs the cold eye of calculation over you when you are in need. I'm part of that eye. The colder I get, the more money I save Them, the more They need me, the more I make. I make enough now to be able to forget insurance completely for the 12.5 percent of my life I can almost call my own.

She'd lost her husband, hence the black. The death certificate looked all right; I'd seen it. But the amount insured was far too big for her address. She'd paid just four installments on a straight life policy. A great bull of a truck driver, her husband. He'd died of kidney failure. Acute nephritis. Bang, like that. Unlikely.

"Better see the doc," Hardy had advised me. "He may be only blind incompetent, but it just might be the start of a racket. You know what to look for."

Well, I didn't find it. London has plenty of men who make a full-time job of hiding their wealth, but nearly everyone has an Achilles heel, one little giveaway clue. I satisfied myself that Dr. Franklin was no blushing Midas. His cramped little rooms, ten-year-old car, dilapidated bag and cheap instruments could have been cover-up, but his statement cleared him absolutely.

"So you think I ought to have foreseen the kidney trouble?" He sat in glum silence a moment. "You might say Mike Rattigan's trouble is endemic to the district. I could name a dozen who are as likely to go that way as he did. But I'd have to give them a clean bill of health all the same. So would any medical man. Have a look at his record card."

There was a memo from the local hospital. With a good deal more detail than had appeared on the death certificate it itemized the man's injuries on entry the previous October. Rattigan had discharged himself in a matter of hours—as soon, in fact, as he was able to stand on his feet again. He had not reported to his own doctor on return home and a few days later had started back to work in a groggy state. When at last his wife sent for Dr. Franklin because Mike had collapsed, it was too late for the drugs to take effect. Both kidneys packed up. Rattigan died.

"Following injuries received..." I prompted the doctor. "How?"

"Rattigan was found unconscious on the roadway at three A.M. Claimed he was walking back from an overnight run, having

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garaged the truck, when he saw headlights swerving towards him. Thought to himself the driver must be tight and remembered no more."

"Whereas?"

"Multiple injuries to the surface of the body, mostly bruising and split flesh. Bruises on ribs showed the shape of toe-caps. Damage to the kidneys must have occurred at the same time as the severe contusions, with laceration, to the small of the back."

"Not consistent with his having been run down by a car?"

"Individual bruises were overlaid, indicating repeated heavy blows with a blunt instrument. Almost jellied the kidneys. He was warned of possible consequences when he left the hospital."

"Didn't want to stay and answer awkward questions. Scared?"

"He was scared all right." The doctor grunted, his eyes on the dead man's clip of papers. "And not the only one round here who's in the same state. You don't ask too many questions in this neighborhood. I've been warned as much myself."

That was all he'd been able to tell me. I didn't envy him his practice. And I'd no reason to advise Hardy not to pay up. Dying as a result of assault is perfectly proper, insurancewise—provided the thugs didn't benefit themselves. Which was why I had to check on the widow.

The truck had paused, blocking the pavement, though the street ahead was empty of all but wind. I couldn't pass without drawing attention to myself because the woman in black was still there on the other side. I could hear her speaking, but her voice was too low for me to catch the words.

Perhaps the driver was only some mate of her husband's. Perhaps, on the other hand, this was the man whose existence I must suspect—Mike Rattigan's rival who was ready to slip into his shoes, collect widow and insurance, as possibly he'd been ready to dispose of Mike in the first place.

Then the truck *brrrrmed,* the air brakes signed off. As it moved away, the woman's face was revealed, hard as a bag of nails, eyes narrowed as she stared after the truck. Number Two theory went the way of my suspicions of Doc Franklin. If Mrs. Rattigan had favors to bestow they wouldn't go to the driver of that truck.

I let the woman turn back into the wind and continue up the street. Ahead the road forked to either side of a sleazy pub. Victorian terrace houses curved grimly away to the left, but on the right one side had been demolished just before the war and an uncompromising barracks-block of workers' flats rose up from a concrete court. Many years of London's smoke had blackened the face of the building. The bricks

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might once have been red or yellow. Now only a knife blade could tell you. The uniform windows were hung with nylon net curtains, but they ran through all shades from off-white to clerical gray. Whether the tone indicated the length of stay or the housewifely prowess of their tenants I wouldn't venture to bet on. Some and some, I'd say, looking up the cliff face of identically glazed frames.

There's women for you—put them in uniform and it accentuates their individuality. Let them loose on fashion and they all end up looking alike.

I wondered what kind of woman was walking along ahead of me then, anonymous in her mourning. Death retains its ritual better among the poor. The upper classes minimize the black unless it happens to suit them: lilac cashmere cardigans and pearls are considered more flattering. But east of Trafalgar Square they are Not Enough. Mrs. Rattigan was doing her bit, true to background. I wondered if she'd paid yet for her all-black outfit—and where she'd found enough money for the premiums on Mike's insurance.

In a doorway ahead a slight movement caught my eye—wind tugging at a dark-blue overcoat. Behind the movement the stolid mass of a London bobby. But they don't need to patrol here, because local crime is clockwork-regular; cops can be simply dumped and their primitive mechanisms set in motion—nothing sophisticated, no supersonic brains. Just a simple punch-card system, maybe slung on knitting pins, number eights, and a little chute for the villains' cards to come tumbling down. Something easily dismantled back at headquarters, each one numbered and reissued in enormous boots and uniform dark blue.

London's police, both Metropolitan and City, function on repetitive facts, not on initiative. Pop something new in *modus operandi* in their slot and the system whirs to a halt. Blue smoke emits from top of helmet. Not that that is the end of the matter, because back at headquarters there's the Dogged Persistence Branch. Take Superintendent Riggs, for example.

I'd gone straight to him on leaving Dr. Franklin. As I'd expected, he'd given some thought to Rattigan's "street accident"—particularly, he told me, since it followed so closely on a little interview he'd had with the man two days before it. On the subject of hijacked trucks. Rattigan had behaved like a clam, though the direction the questions took had never surprised him in the least.

An hour exactly after they'd let Rattigan go an anonymous tip had been phoned in. Riggs acted promptly on the information and they'd picked up a truckload of

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top quality baled silk setting off on the Great North Road. Unfortunately the two men with it had slipped through the net, and the legitimate driver and his mate, discovered later tied up in an abandoned Limehouse garage, were unable to describe their attackers.

"So the gang decided it was Rattigan who'd squealed and they had to teach him a lesson?" I asked.

"It would seem so," Superintendent Riggs agreed cautiously.

"And the insurance on Rattigan had been taken out because of the extra risk in the crooked part of his job. The hijacking also provided the money to pay the premiums."

"It all fits in."

"Like a jigsaw. But too well. Life's not as flat as that: it's a three-dimensional puzzle, maybe four—"

Riggs hadn't quite liked it either, but what could he do? Nothing else came to light on Rattigan's mishap or on the hijacking. I was staking all now on an interview with the widow.

And I'd drawn a blank.

She had asked me into her small sitting room and switched on the electric fire, told me how glad she was the insurance was coming through, never questioning that I'd come only to expedite the payment. She was all she should have been, uncomplaining, anxious, a little nervous at having a stranger in her rooms, respectable, determined to do her best. Her voice betrayed her as a West Country woman. From South Devon, she confided. She'd met Rattigan there on holiday six years back and they'd run away together and got married in London. No, she'd never go back. The family had been critical and now London was where she belonged. She'd become a townee. She'd get another job in a week or two and move into a bed-sitting-room somewhere handy. She'd manage, she really would.

"*Another* job?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. That's how I could afford the insurance, you see. I worked in the office of Howard Hayworth, Mike's firm. He said we would do all right on his pay and mine could go into savings. Well, this insurance seemed a good thing. We hadn't any children, but there was always the possibility... We thought it would mean security for the baby. I lost it, though. A miscarriage three months ago."

She seemed to be having all the bad luck. I wouldn't add to it. I sent in the claim form marked *Approved*...

Now, in view of my glimpse of her at Waterloo this morning, I sat over a heaped breakfast plate and questioned whether Larry Moss was really as good on women as was generally supposed. I ordered another coffee, drank it scalding, and made a phone call

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to Hardy to ask whether there'd been any payment yet on Mike Rattigan's life.

"Rattigan?" he repeated, and sighed to remind me that he was the great administrative Octopus and I the mere point of one telephonic tentacle.

"City truck driver, kidney collapse after a bad beating up," I reminded him.

"I remember the file. No, no payment yet. Do you want it stopped? Has anything come up?"

I hesitated. "Don't be in a hurry to pay," I compromised. Amazingly, Hardy laughed—a little dyspeptic telemicro gasp. "I never am, lad."

I checked that he'd no need of me for a full day and rang off. Two hours later I was bound for Devon by train.

Although I'd not go all the way with Messrs. Freud and Jung, there's something in what they say about stripping the adult back to childhood to find the truth. I've tried it before and it often peels complications off a case.

Moura Pettit had been a thin plain child, as I saw in the family photograph album. Her mother, two sisters, and brother Jimmy were big, bland, and easy-going. Moura took after her dead father and they spoke of her with affectionate tolerance. If hard feelings had followed her marriage they were only on Moura's side. As for it being a runaway affair, I saw the wedding pictures, bulging with beaming relatives on the bride's side and only one shriveled little woman on the groom's.

"Mike's Mum," explained Moura's mother. "She was an invalid and that's why we all went up to London for the wedding. It would have been nicer here but the poor old dear couldn't travel."

In my guise as a feature writer gathering copy for a "Victims of Our Roads" article I supposed that now the widow would come home to her family.

"Not at all," I was assured. "She's doing very well, our Moura is. She has a wonderful job in London. She'd never make a quarter of that money here. You should see some of the lovely presents she's sent us!" And I did.

I tried to plant the seed of suspicion that Moura might be ready to marry again, but the ground it fell on was barren with ridicule. Her mother scoffed at the notion. "Not unless he was a millionaire," she qualified at last. "No, she tried marriage once and had enough of just scraping along. Now she's free she'll make her mark in business, you'll see. She always was ambitious and she has a sort of flair. Whatever she really wants she gets."

"Like Mike," said her sister reflectively. "It was me he came after first. Only I never wanted to leave this place. Not to go to dirty old London!"

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My food for thought was hardly more appetizing than my British Railways meal on the journey home. My teeth kept encountering the gristle of Moura's needless duplicity. Why had she bothered to lie to me? To excuse her preference for staying in London? To keep me at a distance from her family, to keep me from being fed a different set of lies? Was that so important? All I'd really learned from them was that she was on to a good source of money. And the pastel mink in Waterloo Station had already told me that.

One fact alone emerged that was news to me. Moura Rattigan already had a new job. Mine was to discover what it was.

Despite my burrowings, stone turnings, and avenue explorings, days went by and not one of my West End contacts could identify the photograph of Moura, retouched, that her mother had given me. Hardy, however unwilling to let the Group pay out, was pressing me for a definite decision on the Rattigan case. I tried calling on her but the flat was locked up. The woman next door said she'd gone for a few days to the country. Much as I disliked admitting defeat I rang Hardy and told him I'd dropped the inquiry. All he said in reply was the amount of the claim, and he spoke as though his own personal account would be charged.

Two days later, outside the Chilterns Hotel, I actually saw her. In a tight silver sheath of *mmmm* expensive simplicity she was sliding out of a matching Rolls-Royce. She had the uniformed commissionaire running alongside with an outsize umbrella and she trailed a white fox cape casually behind her up the carpeted steps.

I didn't think she'd recognize me in my West End outfit but at such close quarters one can't take risks. I momentarily tipped my Guards Officer bowler over my nose as she passed, yawned behind it but kept my eyes wide-open. At the glass doors she turned and looked back. I had the shock of my life.

One thing a correctly dressed young man doesn't do in Mayfair is ask a lady's name of a hotel servant—not at a good hotel, that is. So, "Who's the old boy?" I asked the gold-laced flunky when he'd saluted the woman's escort out of sight. He told me, slipping the banknote deftly into a pocket.

So *that* was Lord Shaloe who had taken over the newly merged Kaine-Wurzer fashion empire. I'd never seen him or his photograph before but I'd been reading plenty over the past six months in business journals and the gossip columns. The personal fortune he managed was principally his wife's, but the organizing genius was his own. Obviously, if I could still believe that the woman with him was the humble Moura Rattigan transformed, I'd have to do some

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detailed homework on the Kaine-Wurzer empire.

If—a big word. It was easier to accept that the truck driver's widow had a wealthy double. Except for that evidence of my eyes at Waterloo Station and the common thread that ran through the two women's lives—textiles and the identical face. Or, more correctly, half a face. Because when the hotel beauty had turned at the door I'd seen the side that had been hidden from me as she passed. All down it, from temple across cheekbone to jaw, unsuccessfully concealed by careful makeup, was a dark-red, disfiguring birthmark. If this was really Moura Rattigan, then she must deliberately have chosen disfigurement as part of her disguise. And how could a woman who so patently reveled in her own beauty do so hideous a thing?

I made it my business to lunch next day with a fashion-journalist friend. For the price of four basic courses and two bottles of *Pouilly-Fuisse* I learned that Lady Shaloe, although rich and cautious, was neither as young as her husband nor as comely. And Shaloe himself was reputedly easy game for a pretty face. Which might well account for his new business partner's acceptability to Lady Shaloe, for no one, assessing Moura from the chin up, could have called her pretty. And in Lady Shaloe's opinion—I was guessing now—to the lower seven-eighths of a woman her husband was more resistant. In which she might yet be proved right or wrong. Not that she had much time left to research the subject. Three days after my luncheon date Lady Shaloe was featured in *The Times*. On page ten, under OBITUARIES. "Suddenly, at her home . . ."

This death wasn't in Superintendent Riggs's City province but it qualified for Metropolitan Police investigation. Nevertheless it was to Riggs I went sniffing for details, knowing what a prey he'd be to my contagious curiosity. Two hours before it broke in headlines I had the details of the case.

The Shaloes' Park Lane apartment had been burgled. Lady Shaloe, due at some Embassy reception, had opted out, pleading a nervous headache. She'd been asleep in bed, doped with barbiturate, when her husband left on his own. The thieves must have found her so and bungled the tying-up business. She had been smothered by their gag as she lay helpless and half torpid in the dark. Everything that was portable and of value was gone, and so too was a pigskin suitcase stamped with the initials *RS*.

Routine investigation produced a taxi driver who had picked up a couple on nearby Curzon Street at the appropriate time. Apart from the pigskin case, neither had appeared remarkable. The woman had worn a black coat. He had

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dropped them both at the Alexandra Gate of Hyde Park—near the parking lot, I noted.

"Looks like a genuine accident," said Riggs, giving me his deceptively innocent blink.

"As in the case of Mike Rattigan, deceased," I agreed.

He swore gently. "Oh, no! You're not linking those two? In London, East is East and West is West. You know how it goes."

I admitted it looked unlikely. "All the same," I told him, remembering a face that had once looked as hard as a bag of nails, "I'd like to know where the Widow Rattigan was at the time in question. And a certain truck driver too. I haven't his name but I'll give you the registration number of the truck he was driving on the day I interviewed Mrs. Rattigan at home. I just have a hunch he might be under that lady's thumb."

It was all too easy from then on because Riggs took hardly any time to get hold of the man, and in this chain he was the weakest link, a toughie with a solid-ivory brain. At once he assumed that the Rattigan woman had sold him out and saddled him with a couple of murders. He couldn't tell his story fast enough.

The late Mike Rattigan had run the gang, it seemed, until a certain date when Moura implied that he, Rory Meakin, would be a fitter leader. He'd been sweet on Moura too and was sure she'd be part of the spoils. She had put him up to waylaying Rattigan on his way home from an overnight run. Meakin had left him for dead at the roadside, but it had taken some time for his injuries to kill him—long enough for Meakin to regret it and to learn that Moura was a harder master than Mike had ever been.

She had taken over the gang and stepped up the hijacking, because somehow she'd made a new contact and now could clear any amount of quality textiles. She even had a man in the Customs Office who tipped her off where the best cargoes were unloading. She'd kept all her contacts secret from the others and used to disappear for a week or so at a time. Just two days back she'd suddenly turned up with this latest plan. Meakin hadn't wanted any part of it, but she'd threatened to leak to Superintendent Riggs his part in killing Rattigan, a strictly edited version that left her in the role of shattered innocent. So he'd agreed to help with a bit of simple burglary.

Only when they'd broken into the apartment this woman had been there in bed. Moura hadn't seemed surprised, just told him what to pack in the suitcase and she would attend to the woman. When he'd gone through to tell her he'd finished, he found the

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woman finished too, with a pillow across her face. He'd had no part in it, as God was his judge. It was Moura all the way, her idea and her doing. He didn't think she gave a damn for what they'd stolen. She'd gone there purely to do the old girl in.

Superintendent Riggs dispatched Meakin to the cells. "He's survived so long himself only because the woman was confident she couldn't be traced," he said. "Now we'll have a word with Shaloe. I think I smell a conspiracy here."

But Shaloe was another innocent—he had never heard of the Rattigans or of Meakin. The only person he'd told of his wife's indisposition was the textile buyer Miss Venture and his hosts of that evening.

Riggs left him cooling in a waiting room while his men scoured East London for the missing Moura Rattigan. I let him have his hour of frustration, then suggested he pull in Stella Venture. "Shaloe's business partner," I reminded him. "He'll tell you her address and regular habits. You might, since he's still here, get some background on her from him."

Riggs let me sit in on the interview. He phoned down for a car to bring the lady in. While we waited he gently probed Shaloe afresh.

Shaloe obviously admired her business acumen enormously. She was the most efficient buyer he'd ever used. He'd first met her when she sold him a truckload of Thai silk and he had persuaded her to come over to him, knowledge, contacts, and all. She bulk-bought at the lowest prices on the current market and was inexhaustibly painstaking over detail, often ordering redyeing of a complete order to catch up with a new whim of fashion. As a person she was sensible, adaptable, and discreet, a woman he could take anywhere and introduce to anyone. His wife had come to rely on her judgment too. Oh, no, there had been no question of any personal entanglement. Miss Venture has a quite distressing disfigurement: he can barely bring himself to look at her directly.

"Does it trouble *her?*" I asked him. "Sap her confidence or anything like that?"

"I used to think not," he said, "but just recently—"

"Has she referred to it herself?"

"Only indirectly. But she would mention some new treatment, a series of operations. It would take time, of course, and be very expensive. I had offered to help, but Stella—Miss Venture—refused any loan. She had the idea my wife would disapprove. I assured her it need never be disclosed, but she wouldn't take any money from me. She is like that, sensitive about certain things and entirely selfless."

"But now, with Lady Shaloe gone, perhaps . . .?"

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"I don't know. I hadn't thought about it. Perhaps she might change her mind now and take the money. I shall have to bring up the question again, but tactfully, of course, and only after a very discreet interval."

"Of course."

I left Riggs to finish the case. I didn't want to see the woman again, or Shaloe's face when he learned that all the thousands he was prepared to give her, ostensibly for a plastic surgeon, could have been saved by a small shilling tube of cleansing cream. Greasepaint in her case was more than mere disguise: it had been her protective coloration, preventing the wife's suspicions of a rival until such time as Moura was ready to take Shaloe over, inherited fortune and all. The only barrier that stood between them was this hideous dark-red stain, and now the need for it was gone, with Lady Shaloe's going. Moura the strong, dynamic executive. And we call women the weaker sex!

Riggs rang me and asked if there was anything I needed to close my Rattigan file. Not really, but I still felt a small itch of curiosity. I told him, and since it meant nothing to him, he sent me the card once he'd located it.

On one side was the smudged ink of a printed weight. As I'd observed at Waterloo Station, she weighed in the vicinity of 130 pounds. I turned it over slowly. On the back was the prestamped character reading. She was, the card said, sensitive to her surroundings, eager to merge with her background, and had almost chameleon adaptability.

As I'd guessed, protective coloration! Well, by the very nature of serendipity, these cards had to come out right just once in a while. On the surface. It didn't go on to explain what lay beneath the skin.

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a *NEW* detective-crime *NOVELET* by

A. H. Z. CARR

Another novelet by the author of "The Trial of John Nobody" (EQMM, November 1950), "Tyger! Tyger!" (EQMM, October 1952), "The Black Kitten" (EQMM, April 1956), "The Washington Party Murder" (EQMM, July 1964), and "The Nameology Murder" (EQMM, July 1965)—and, as always, a distinguished story with a large plus value . . .

Here are some comments on this new story from our reading staff: "Mr. Carr writes with such conviction that he produces a feeling of reality that one seldom meets in fiction"; and "Mr. Carr's people and dialogue ring true."

The author tells us that the story "grew out of close contact this past summer with a number of high-school youngsters, and was conceived as a more or less orthodox detective story; but in the writing its direction shifted" . . . as you will see . . .

THE OPTIONS OF TIMOTHY MERKLE

by A. H. Z. CARR

Timothy Merkle was glad to be a source of pleasure for his parents, but he wished they were not so vocal about it. A short item in the *Wynnwood Morning Star* had made Henry and Edna Merkle glow all day with pride in their son. That night, at dinner, Henry said, "Most everybody in the office saw it. Bill Browder wanted to know how much a college scholarship like that is worth. When I told him at least a thousand a year for the four years he could hardly believe it. People kept saying, 'You're lucky to have a son like that.'" He smiled at Tim fondly.

"Yeah," Tim muttered, attacking the pork chop on his plate with unnecessary force.

"The same thing at the supermarket," said Edna Merkle. She was a frail woman with large dark

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eyes. The sad lines of her thin face told of prolonged worry, too much housework, and an early menopause. Now, however, she looked almost happy. "Bessie Stern said to me, 'You must be so proud of Tim,' and I told her, 'Yes, I am.' Myra Wilson said she supposed you'd be a journalist, and I said I expected so, and she asked were you really going to college, like she didn't believe it, and I said yes, now that you had the scholarship you certainly were going even if we had to skimp on other things."

Tim winced internally, but said nothing. Superficially he resembled both his parents; he had Henry's height and light coloring and his mother's wide expressive mouth; but according to Edna the bone structure of his face had been inherited from her father—who, she never tired of saying, had been a lawyer. "Your grandfather had a strong nose and chin like yours," she often told Timothy, with a sidelong glance at Henry's mild features. "He could have been a judge if he had lived."

Henry said, "You really could have knocked me over with a feather, though, when George Flagg stopped at my desk." He referred to the president of the Flagg Valve Company, Wynnwood's largest industry, where Henry was in charge of stock and inventory. "George said, 'You and Edna certainly deserve a lot of credit, bringing up a boy like Tim.' You know how his voice booms. Everybody heard him. And I said, 'Well, thank you, George. I guess most of the credit goes to Edna.'"

"I've never approved of your calling him George," Edna Merkle interrupted. "It's too familiar."

"Everybody does it. He wants it that way, informal. He says we're all on the same team, we ought to use first names."

Repressing a snort, Tim maintained his deadpan expression. He had long since realized that George Flagg's hearty palship toward his employees did not carry over into their paychecks. How many years was it since his father had dared ask for a raise?

"Then he really surprised me." Henry was saying. "He closed the door of the office and sat down on the corner of my desk and said he was concerned about his boy Denny. I guess he's not doing too well at school, is he?"

"I wouldn't know," Tim replied. "Denny and I don't connect much."

"From what George said, he's running a bit wild. The age for it, I guess. Eighteen, isn't he?"

Edna, who was putting another pork chop on Tim's plate, said, "Yes, I remember I used to see the Flagg's nursemaid wheeling Denny in the park when I was carrying Tim. He's just a year older than Tim."

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Henry smiled at her indulgently. "Then George said, 'What's this *Red-'n'-Green Magazine* look like that Tim's editor of?' Well, I said it was just a high-school magazine, but that it gets enough ads from local stores so that nowadays it was printed instead of mimeographed and it looked kind of like a tabloid newspaper. I told him they picked you for chief editor on account of your column *Objection Sustained* was the most popular feature they ever had. George asked were you a radical and I said no, but you always spoke out when you thought things weren't right.

"Then George surprised me again. He wanted to know whether the magazine carried pictures—photographs, that is—and I said no, I'd never seen one, probably because you had to keep expenses 'way down, and could just about afford to publish the magazine the way it was with a little help from the Riverside High Alumni Society. That was when he talked about Denny."

Tim looked up alertly. "Where does Denny come into it?"

A faintly embarrassed expression crossed his father's face. "Well, George said he wondered whether Denny could work for the magazine. He said he wanted to see him get into something besides trouble, and a regular assignment like that might be just what he needed. He said Denny was no writer, but he's pretty good with a camera, and if it was just a question of paying for photographs in the paper, he would put up the money. Of course, I told him I had nothing to say about it, but he asked me to talk to you and let him know what you say."

Tim waited impatiently until his father paused. "Oh, brother! Wouldn't you know George Flagg would come up with an idea like that! Listen, dad, a lot of kids at the school have been trying to get on the magazine, really working at it, sending in stuff, soliciting ads, delivering the copies. It wouldn't be fair to them if I took on Denny. What's he ever done?"

"You could try him out, couldn't you?"

The urgency in Henry's voice made Tim's insides tighten with resentment, not at his father so much as at a way of life in which the Flaggs could push around the Merkles who worked for them. He said evenly, "It's a lousy thing for George Flagg to ask."

"Well, he's used to having his own way, Tim. And there's the money, don't forget that. I'll bet there's not many high-school magazines that have photographs."

"Sure, I'd like to be able to afford half-tones," Tim admitted. "But Denny! He'd be goofing off half the time. You can't control him."

"I'll bet *you* could."

"I'd rather not try. When he

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went out for football, what happened? He broke training until the coach bounced him off the squad. Big ego—won't accept discipline. He spends most of his time outside of school driving around town with girls. What help would he be on the mag?"

"That's George Flagg's fault," said Edna. "Giving a boy of his age a car was putting temptation in his path."

"The car'd come in handy for a photographer though," Henry persisted.

Noting the stubborn expression on Tim's face, his mother intervened. "Now, Tim, don't be hasty. I think you would be a good influence on Dennis. That's what George Flagg is thinking about, I'm sure. You could help him. It would be a Christian act." Edna was a conscientious churchgoer.

Tim ran a hand through his sandy hair, which he wore back from his forehead and somewhat shorter than the vogue demanded. To avoid looking at his parents' anxious faces he worked away at his dinner, and chewed. He did not need to be told the importance to his family of keeping on good terms with George Flagg. His mother's pleading voice recalled a time, some years before, when after a harsh rebuke from George, Henry had spoken of quitting his job and moving to another town, and she had cried that she couldn't stand it, she'd rather die.

"Tim-boy," said his father, "I'd like to be able to tell George tomorrow morning. He'll be expecting me to."

After a moment Tim said slowly, "It's not all up to me. I'll have to talk to the others." These words, he knew, committed him. The other members of the *Red-'n'-Green* staff and the faculty advisers were not likely to object to Denny if through him the magazine got enough money to break out with photographs.

Two days later, encountering Denny in a school corridor, he asked him if he would like to join the staff of *Red-'n'-Green*. Denny said, "Yeah, why not? Keep Big Daddy happy." He was large, handsome, blue-eyed, and tight-lipped. A heavy fall of dark hair covered half his forehead. "Do I get a by-line?"

That was Denny—recognition first, work later. Tim said evenly, "Depends how good you do."

"Take a look," said Denny. He opened a wallet and extracted some color snapshots. "I got these with my Leica at the game two weeks ago."

"Pretty good. But we can't use color."

"Why not?"

"Color plates run into big money. Even the black and whites cost like crazy."

"Big Daddy is working out a deal with the principal right now

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to get you money for pics. Suppose I ask him to raise the ante."

"I still wouldn't do it. Too—well, pretentious. Color pictures mean glossy paper and an expensive print job. For a high-school magazine? Forget it. We want to get the school excited about the stuff we print, not the way we dress it up."

"Yeah, okay, I get that. But it doesn't mean you couldn't use some of these shots. You could print 'em in black and white."

The willful expression on Denny's face made Tim realize he would have to assert himself, if he was going to keep the older boy under any kind of control. "No. Can't be done. They wouldn't come out."

"Who says so? People get color movies on black and white TV sets all the time."

"Sure, and haven't you noticed how blotchy they are? You lose contrast, or you get false contrast. On TV it doesn't matter too much, with all the movement. But in a still photo it would look terrible."

"I don't see why."

"I'll tell you why. You take a picture with a lot of red in it. Like that one you have there, of the girl cheerleader in the red sweater. Let's have it for a second." Denny shuffled through the batch of photographs in his hand. "No, the one in the red sweater. You passed it. That one." Tim plucked the snapshot from Denny's hand. "You make an ordinary halftone from this, and when you printed it the sweater would come out black."

"So?"

"So the dark green letters, Riverside, on the sweater, they would come out nearly black too. No contrast. You couldn't read the letters."

"I don't buy that."

"It's a fact. Of course, you could use special filters and keep some contrast, but that would cost the earth. Out of the question for us. Take my word for it. You'll have to stick to black and white shots."

Tim sensed that Denny was groping for further argument and blocked it by adding, "The first thing you've got to do, Denny, is understand the printing operation. Ever seen a magazine put on the press?" Denny shook his head. "Okay, here's what we'll do. I've got to be at the printers' this afternoon. You meet me there and watch how we put the thing together. That way you'll have a better feel for the job. Okay?"

"Yeah, I guess so. What time?"

A few nights later Tim's father, beaming, recounted another conversation with George Flagg at the office. "George says it's the first time he ever heard Denny have anything good to say about anybody at school. According to Denny you really know your stuff."

"How would he know?"

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"What? Oh, you got to give him time. George says he's keen about the magazine. I sure hope you two are going to hit it off."

"Yes," said Mrs. Merkle. "It would be wonderful if you and Denny were good friends." Tim noted the unaccustomed hopefulness in her voice. He wondered what she would say if he told her that Denny, by his own boast, drank whiskey, had smoked pot, and "made out" with half a dozen girls at school.

In the two months that followed, Denny proved a more useful asset to *Red-'n'-Green* than Tim had hoped. A small fund set up by the Flagg Valve Company enabled the magazine to pay the costs of photo illustration, Denny turned in a number of creditable shots, the student body and faculty approved, and several local merchants increased their advertising. Denny basked in the glow of his by-line—"Photo by Flagg." His cream-colored sports convertible, with its red bucket seats, became a familiar sight in front of the Merkle's modest house, as he drove Tim home from sessions at the printers' or picked him up for editorial conferences at the school. A party at the Flaggs', to which Tim was invited, gave the Merkles special cause for elation, for the next day George Flagg said to Henry, "Fine boy, Tim—mature for his age."

The only time Henry and Edna displayed a doubt about Denny's friendship for Tim was an evening when the cream convertible pulled up in front of their home with two laughing girls in the front seat with Denny, one a vivid redhead, the other a full-blown brunette. As they sounded the horn and Tim started for the door Edna said, "Those girls. Are they—nice?"

"Oh, for gosh sakes, mom," Tim said, leaving her to try to figure out what he meant.

Sitting in the back seat with Margie, the plump brunette who was pressing her thigh and breast against him and waiting to be kissed, Tim felt as if he had been cast for a juvenile role in a third-rate TV show. He felt a strong sexual pull toward the girl, but he didn't *like* her, and the confusion of his impulses angered him. It further annoyed him to watch Denny steering with one hand at 70 miles an hour while fondling his red-headed date with the other. At one point, after a close call with a truck, he called, "Why not try driving with no hands, Denny?"

"Don't tempt me, I might," Denny said over his shoulder.

"Hey, red light! Don't you believe in traffic signals?"

"Oh, was it red? Keep your shirt on, *compadre*." They were in the same Spanish class. "Why don't you concentrate on your own girl?"

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Later, at a juke-box dance joint, Denny whispered, "Listen, if you don't go for Margie, I think you could make out with Louise if you want to. She thinks you're cute." Louise was the redhead.

"Thanks. I'll file the info for reference."

Denny grinned. "You're so damn virtuous. Or maybe chicken. How long you going to stay pure? Editors are supposed to know about life, right? How you ever going to know if you don't go all the way?"

"I'll pick the time. And the girl. Let's drop it."

Denny stared at him. "Okay, *compadre*. I was only doing you a favor. You don't know what you're missing."

A week or so later, on a Friday, when Henry opened his newspaper at the breakfast table, his attention was held by an account of a hit-and-run accident the night before. "Gosh, poor old Gaddis. Remember him, Edna? Used to be a mailman."

"What happened?"

"Dead. Hit by a car. Skull fractured. Not far from here—corner of Van Buren and Pine."

"Oh, what a shame. That family has had nothing but tragedy. There's just his daughter left now. How did it happen?"

Henry read aloud: "A pedestrian who was near the scene of the accident, Mr. James P. Martin of 418 Pine Street, told the police that it occurred a few minutes after 10:00 P.M. It was raining heavily at the time. Mr. Martin stated that although the rain and his umbrella interfered with his vision, he saw Mr. Gaddis standing at the intersection, apparently waiting to cross Van Buren Street, and he noticed that a light-colored car had stopped on Van Buren for the traffic light. Mr. Martin had turned down Pine Street and was walking toward his home when a scream made him turn around. By the time he ran back to where Mr. Gaddis lay, the car was gone.

"Mr. Martin dragged Mr. Gaddis' unconscious body back to the curb, and ran to a nearby tavern to telephone the police. A few minutes later a squad car arrived, driven by Sergeant John Linko, who called for an ambulance. Mr. Gaddis was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital, where he died at 11:10 P.M. The police have issued an appeal for the driver of the car to come forward, warning that if he does not do so immediately the charge against him when he is caught may be criminal manslaughter, carrying a jail sentence up to ten years."

"Oh, my," said Edna. "Poor Martha Gaddis."

"That's the daughter? I don't think I ever met her."

"Oh, yes, you did, Henry. The one who used to play the piano and had that bad fall and was

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crippled so she couldn't play any more. After that she just looked after her father. She must be fifty now."

"Oh, that one. I remember now."

"They were living on his pension and Social Security. I wonder what she'll do, poor thing."

His parents' sympathy was probable genuine, Tim thought, but they sounded smug. He supposed it was natural for people who had troubles to get a kick out of the worse troubles of others. His own reaction was journalistic. "I wonder how many hit-and-runs there've been in this town. I might get a column out of that."

"That would be real nice," said his mother. "A kind of memorial for poor Mr. Gaddis."

The idea for an article on local hit-and-run cases grew in Tim's mind as he walked to school. Of all the different kinds of lice in the world, a hit-and-run driver had to be about the worst. The police department might have some statistics. Lead off with the human-interest angle, the Gaddis family, the daughter's situation. No chance of her collecting damages unless the guilty driver could be found. Title? Something with the word "manslaughter"—that would grab the attention.

Tim chuckled at a phrase that occurred to him—Who Put the Laughter in Manslaughter? Couldn't use it—not the place for a gag. What about photographs? A body lying in the street and a car speeding away. Obvious, maybe, but effective. Denny ought to be able to rig a picture like that. Be good for him. Might make him think about his own driving style.

Then Tim stopped short on the sidewalk. Denny, light-colored car—oh, no, crazy. Hundreds of light-colored cars around town. He was startled to think that so irrational a suspicion would even cross his mind. Maybe he was unconsciously envious of Denny. Poor boy and rich boy. How about that? Have to watch it.

With a few minutes to spare before his first class he stopped at the little room that served as an office for *Red-'n'-Green.* On his desk was an envelope containing a note from Denny and a few pictures. The note said, "See you Monday, *compadre.* Big Daddy has to huddle with some Commissioner at the State House and he thinks it will be good for my citizenship or what have you to go along and watch the Legislature in session, so I'm cutting out for the day and driving up with him. Who knows? Maybe I'll get to meet the Governor. Big Daddy put a fat check in his kitty last election. Take a look at these pics. O.K.?"

He thought no more about Denny until late that afternoon, when he was leaving the school; Denny's red-headed girl friend, Louise, caught him by the arm. He had

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the impression she was waiting for him, but she pretended surprise, saying, "If it isn't my dream man! Why don't you ever look my way? Don't you like me? Come on, buy me a shake. I'm hungry."

She was remarkably pretty and had more than once figured in Tim's nighttime reveries, but she was quite right; he had avoided her, sensing that if he once nibbled at her bait she would hook him and reel him in, in spite of any resistance he might put up. Nevertheless, he let her pull him into the Shake Shop, a place he usually stayed away from, partly because he thought of it as a kids' place, partly for reasons of economy. As they brought their milk shakes to a relatively quiet corner she said, "You always look so serious. Like an editor. I'll play. Want to interview me?"

He laughed. "Why not? I'd like to get your views on the new thing in skirts. Is it true that next year girls will skip skirts entirely and just wear panties to school?"

"Don't be like that. Too bad you're not my man. If you were I could give you the biggest story you ever had."

"I thought Denny was your man."

"Oh, Denny." She tossed her long sleek red hair in disdain. "He and I are through."

"Why?"

"He thinks he's God Almighty with that car and all that money. But he doesn't really dig *love*. Know what I mean?"

"I guess so."

She studied his thin bony face and intense eyes. "Why did they call you Timothy? Isn't that a kind of hay?"

"What's wrong with hay?"

"I bet you never roll in it. You don't have to answer that. Anyway, I'm fed up with boys who never think of anything else." She took a long swallow of her milk shake, wiped her lips daintily, and added, "Last night was awful."

"Last night?"

"Umm. I walked out on Denny. On the whole party."

"What party was that?"

She wrinkled her small nose. "You'd like to know, wouldn't you? I *might* be persuaded to tell you. Man, could we stir up the old school."

Eyeing her speculatively he said, "Let me guess. Reefers?"

Her red tongue darted between her lips. "Don't you wish you knew! I'm not going to tell you. But did I surprise Denny when I told him to get himself another girl and walked out! I'll bet that's never happened to him before."

He lifted his glass in a mock salute. "I drink to you."

"He was really mad. One of the other girls says he went after me. Got in his car and tried to find me. But by that time I'd caught a bus and was on my way home."

"Where's home?"

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"Why? You going to call me? Seven eighteen Van Buren. Here, I'll write down the phone number."

Tim kept his voice cool. "What time did you walk out?"

"Does it matter?"

"I mean, it must have been pretty late for you to be going home alone."

"Well, it wasn't. I don't think it was ten o'clock yet. I just had had it, that's all, and I told him he couldn't turn *me* into a hophead, and I took off. I got sopping wet, too. Are you going to ask me for a date?"

He hesitated, then said slowly, "Louise, I don't know how to say this. Sure, you're beautiful and I'm human. But between my schoolwork and the magazine I don't have time to date girls. Or the money. My dad has never joined the affluent society. Maybe I'm square, but I've sort of figured out the way I've got to handle things while I'm at school, and you're out of my league. For now, anyway."

"Well!" She gave him a look at once sardonic and respectful. "You're frank, anyway. You know something? You're a good kid. I like you."

He said, "I like you, too." They looked at each other and smiled. But some minutes later, when Tim left her, she went instantly out of his mind. It was filled with an image of Denny, maybe high on marijuana, driving along Van Buren Street in pursuit of a girl around the time when Mr. Gaddis had been struck. Stopping at a traffic light. A fast start—and wham! Then panic and escape.

You're imagining the whole thing, he told himself. Accusing Denny of murder! Manslaughter, anyway. The odds were still hundreds to one it was somebody else, not Denny. But he wished he could get rid of the nagging doubt. Maybe he ought to drop the whole thing. No business of his. But that's a hell of an attitude. A crime like that is the business of everybody. An editor, even a high-school editor, has to be concerned. Forget about Denny. Start with the Gaddis accident and then go on to talk about hit-and-run generally. Find out from the police how often young people were involved. That kind of thing.

The sergeant with whom he talked when he phoned police headquarters was not much help. He didn't think they had any statistics on hit-and-run accidents. No, they hadn't traced the car that killed Gaddis. The nearest thing to a witness, Martin, the guy who pulled Gaddis off the street, hadn't really looked at the car, couldn't identify it, except it was light-colored, which didn't mean a thing. As far as the sergeant knew, no driver in a hit-and-run had ever turned himself in—not in Wynnwood, anyway. About all the police could do was to keep their

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eyes open for a light-colored car with a crumpled fender or a dented radiator. Usually there was some kind of mark on a car if it hit somebody hard. But it was a long shot, the sergeant had to admit.

It occurred to Tim that perhaps the best lead for the story might be a first-hand description from Martin—how he felt when he heard Gaddis scream and saw the body. Tim looked at his watch. It was then almost six o'clock. His parents were expecting him for dinner—but maybe a good time to see this Martin was right now. If he had the usual kind of job, he'd probably just be getting home.

Tim stopped at a drug store to consult a telephone directory. There it was—James P. Martin, with a Pine Street address. Better not phone him—might get a brush-off.

Fifteen minutes later Tim was ringing the Martins' doorbell. It was answered by Mr. Martin himself, a stout, amiable, bald man, who seemed gratified when Tim identified himself and told the purpose of his call. "Sure I'll talk to you," he said. "Why not? Come in."

He watched Tim open his notebook and said, "I'm in insurance. Martin and Berger, agents. You might get that in."

"Right," Tim said. "Can you give me the picture, Mr. Martin—just as you saw it?"

"Like I told the police, I was on the way home from a lodge meeting. Walking fast up Van Buren, trying to keep from getting soaked. Passed this light-colored car on my left, white or beige or something, maybe pale green, I didn't really notice. Standing at the intersection, headed my way. Saw it out of the corner of my eye, under the umbrella."

"A sedan?"

"Could have been a compact, maybe, or a convertible. Just before I turned right on Pine I saw Gaddis, didn't know who he was, standing on the other side of Pine, waiting to cross Van Buren. He was wearing a black raincoat. After I turned the corner I walked maybe thirty steps down Pine when I heard this scream. Not loud, but a real bad scream, if you know what I mean.

"I ran back and crossed Pine to where the body was in the street, just off the curb on Van Buren. No sign of the car, not even taillights. Must have scooted around the corner at the next street. Not another soul in sight, either. I know you're not supposed to move an accident case until the ambulance comes, but what was I going to do, leave the old man in the street where another car might run over him? So I pulled him back onto the sidewalk."

Tim visualized the scene—the dark glistening streets, the drenching rain, the stout raincoated man

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holding his umbrella, trying to do the right thing for the unconscious victim, worried that he might be making a mistake. "Did you think he was dead?"

"I don't think so. No, he had to be alive. There was blood on his face being washed off by the rain, and more coming out of his nose."

"You could see all that?"

"Sure. There's a street light there and the traffic light overhead in the middle of the intersection. I could see, all right. I had to get to a phone, so I beat it down to Morgan's Bar a couple of blocks away. The police told me to get back to the body and wait for them, so I did."

"Do you think Mr. Gaddis tried to cross the street against the light?"

"If he did, that driver must be a damn fool. No driver liability if there was contributory negligence like that on the part of the victim."

"You say you think the car might have been green?" If Martin could be sure of that, Denny was out of it.

"Greenish. Come to think of it, though, that might have been only the reflection of the traffic light on the hood."

Tim sat up sharply. "You mean when you passed by, the reflection of the traffic light on the hood was green?"

"Why, yes. I see what you're getting at. Don't know why I didn't think of that myself. It should have been red. Wait a second, though. Maybe it turned green just as I came alongside and the car hadn't started yet. That must be it."

"What about when you ran back? Do you remember how the lights were then?"

Martin puffed out his cheeks in surprise, making his cheerful face seem globular. "Now why didn't the police think of asking me that? It comes back to me. Sure, I saw the reflection in the wet street when I ran up to Gaddis. The light then was green on Pine, red on Van Buren."

"Then it must have changed while your back was turned, in those few seconds."

"It must have. Funny, though. Means the car must have stopped while the light was green on Van Buren, and gone ahead when it turned red. Why would anybody do that? Unless he was color blind. What's the matter?"

The phrase "color blind" triggered memories that ran through Tim like an electric shock. Denny's uncertainty as he tried to pick out a snapshot of a girl in a red sweater. Denny's "Oh, was it red?" —as he passed through a red light. With a sense of foreboding he rose, thanked Mr. Martin, and walked pensively home.

His parents had begun dinner without him. To their questions—

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"What kept you? Why didn't you phone?"—he returned short indifferent answers. He told himself that he was becoming hipped on the subject of Denny. Jumping at conclusions again. After all, Denny was able to see colors. Why else would he be so keen on color pics? And Tim had seen him stop for red lights many a time. Color blindness? He realized that he knew virtually nothing about it. Tim looked thoughtfully at his father, who was wearing his spectacles. "Where'd you get your glasses, dad?" he said.

"What do you want to know for? You don't need glasses."

"No. I was just thinking," Tim improvised, "that maybe we could get some oculist to take an ad in the paper. Lots of kids at school have to buy glasses."

His father took the bait. "You're thinking of an optician. Oculists don't sell glasses—they prescribe them."

"Umm, that's right. Did you go to an oculist?"

"Dr. Strauss. When it comes to eyes it pays to go to the best. But it's no use trying to get him to advertise. Doctors aren't allowed to. Ethics." Tim never interfered with his father's pleasure in telling him the obvious.

As soon as dinner was over Tim made an excuse to go out, headed for a pay phone, and dialed Dr. Strauss's number. The woman who answered, evidently Mrs. Strauss, could be persuaded only with great difficulty to admit that the doctor was at home. Patiently Tim explained that he was writing an article on color blindness and wanted to be able to quote the doctor as Wynnwood's leading authority. Would he be at home tomorrow?

Mrs. Strauss softened and said, "What did you say your name was? Merkle? Wait. I'll find out." She name back to the phone to say, "The doctor says he will see you, if you wish to come over now. He will be too busy tomorrow."

Dr. Strauss was a small brisk man with a clever face and a slight Germanic accent. He was smoking a cigar. "Merkle. I think I remember your father. Astigmatism. You want to know about color blindness? You are color blind?"

"No, sir. But someone I know is, and I thought it would be an interesting subject for the school magazine." He brought out his notebook and poised his pencil over it encouragingly. "I certainly would appreciate anything you can tell me."

The doctor smiled. "It is not my specialty, but I have had a number of cases. In most of them nothing could be done. What do you want to know?"

"When you're color blind it doesn't mean you don't see colors, does it?"

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"No, no." The doctor crossed his legs, and leaned back comfortably in his armchair. "Of course, if the retina does not function properly, everything may seem gray. Monochromatism, that is called. But it is extreme and unusual. Most color blindness is dichromatic. You know what that means?"

"Two colors?"

Dr. Strauss nodded approvingly. "Just so. Some people cannot distinguish well between blue and yellow. Others have trouble with red and green. That is the most common form. Protanopia, it is called. Would you like me to spell that for you?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

Tim's pencil pressed hard on the word as the doctor spelled it. He said, "That's what my friend has. He seems to get red and green mixed up."

"Yes, that happens more often than you might think. Usually it has a hereditary origin, a defect of the optic nerve. Out of twenty-five males you will on the average find one with this trouble. Among women it is less frequent. But, of course, there are different degrees of protanopia. Am I going too fast for you?"

"No, sir. If a man is color blind does he always know it?"

"Not always. If it is only a slight protanopia he may not be aware. If it is more serious he soon finds out. Most of the time he is not troubled. He has been taught the grass is green, so he sees it as green. He knows the flag is red, white, and blue, so when he looks at it those are the colors he sees. But if you show him two postage stamps, red and green, side by side, he may not be able to tell which color is which."

Tim seized the opportunity. "What about traffic lights? People with this—this protanopia—can they tell red lights from green lights?"

The doctor took his time about replying, and carefully flicked the long ash from his cigar onto a tray. "Once or twice I have had to testify in court when a protanopic patient was involved in an accident. But that is not common. Usually the traffic light is sufficiently intense so that unless the color response of the optic nerve is very seriously impaired, the patient can make a correct interpretation. Very few people are denied drivers' licenses because of color blindness."

"Suppose it was raining and the driver had taken a drink, or something? Would that make a difference?"

Pursing his lips, the doctor gazed at Tim with heightened interest. "You have something in your mind you have not told me, I think. Well, well, that is your business. To answer your question, it could be so. Rain, fog—that might make a difference. Alcohol and drugs affect the nervous sys-

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tem, and so could add to any problem of the optic nerve. Under such conditions a protanopic subject might be unable to say whether the light is red or green." He watched Tim's pencil skid over the page of his notebook. "So now you know as much as I do. Is there anything else you wish to ask?"

"No, sir. I can't think of anything. You've been a big help, Doctor. Thank you, sir." Tim stood up.

Dr. Strauss said softly, "Was it a serious accident?"

After a startled moment Tim replied, "Yes, sir, it was." The doctor nodded and accompanied him to the front door.

Circumstantial evidence. Tim had never before thought much about the phrase. What were the facts? A small light-colored car stops at an intersection for a traffic light on a rainy night. The light facing the driver is green. It turns red and he moves forward. The car strikes a pedestrian who has stepped off the curb to cross the street.

Denny Flagg around that time is driving a small light-colored car in the vicinity, looking for a girl who has walked out on him. Probably he has protanopia—can't always distinguish red from green. Probably he has been smoking a reefer. And that was all. Enough for suspicion, but a long way from certainty. There were bound to be a lot of men with protanopia in Wynnwood. Some would be owners of light-colored cars. A few might well have been driving on Van Buren that night.

Okay, then. Leave Denny out of it. Take a crack at the article later. Right now there was schoolwork to worry about. Coming up was an exam in advanced algebra, his weakest subject. What good it would do him as a journalist to be able to solve quadratic equations he did not know, but if he was going to get into college he'd better bone up on that, as on all the other screwy demands of the educational Establishment.

It was not until after the exam on Monday afternoon that he saw Denny, who came into the *Red-'n'-Green* office, saying, "Wanna shake the hand that shook the hand of the biggest crook ever to be elected governor of our fair state?"

Tim grinned. "Good trip?"

"You better believe it. Big Daddy did us proud. We lived high off the hog, and he only winked when I dated one of the girls in the governor's office, who has legs I'll never forget."

It seemed to Tim that Denny's bouncy talk was a little exaggerated, a little forced. "Drive up in your car?" he asked for no particular reason, just making conversation.

A second went by before Denny answered. "Yeah. Why?"

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"I just wondered if your dad is gutsy enough to ride with you."

"Oh, he can take it." Denny relaxed. "I held myself down to a mere eighty."

"Well, I'm glad you're back. Something I want to talk to you about. I've got this idea for an article on hit-and-run accidents. Like that old man, Gaddis, who was killed the other night. It could be a human-interest story and at the same time a plug for careful driving. I've been wondering about pictures. Any ideas?"

As Tim spoke, Denny sat down, his face flushed, his blue eyes burning. He cleared his throat before he replied. "I don't know. Might think of something. What accident you talking about?"

No way out now. Have to go through with it. "Thursday night. Around ten o'clock. There was this small light-colored car driving up Van Buren in the rain. Stopped for a traffic light, and then it must have shot across the intersection and hit the old man just after he stepped off the curb."

The two boys avoided each other's eyes. Denny said hoarsely, "You getting at something?"

With a deep breath Tim said, "I'm not going to pretend with you. I know you were driving around there about that time."

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind. I've got to be sure you didn't do it."

Denny's clenched fist struck the desk. "I thought you were my friend. Some friend! You accusing me? I ought to knock your head off."

"I don't think you will. Anyway, I haven't accused you, I've asked you. I'll ask you again, straight. Did you do it?"

"Go soak your head. Why should I answer any questions from you? I'm through with you. You can take your cruddy magazine and you know what you can do with it." He rose and moved toward the door.

"Hold it, Denny!" Sudden and absolute certainty had come to Tim. "What about the garage man who repaired the car?" As Denny looked at him wildly, Tim went on, "What was it, a dented fender or the radiator? Never mind. You were scared, you told your father, and he decided to avoid trouble. So you and he drive a hundred miles and get the car repaired where no one would connect it with the accident. That's the way it was, wasn't it, Denny? But a thing like that can be traced."

With an effort Denny regained his composure. "Oh, brother, we're smart in this office. So I damaged a fender getting the car out of the garage. So dad got it repaired while we were out of town. So what else is new, *compadre?*"

Now the truth was almost in the open, but the battle, Tim realized, had just begun. "Denny, we've got to talk."

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"I don't got to anything. Except maybe flatten your nose for you." But he made no move.

"Cool it." Tim leaned forward across the littered desk. "You just can't walk away from this."

"You think you're going to turn me in, man?"

"I hope not."

"You got nothing, and I mean nothing. Go ahead with this and your name will be Timothy Ratfink in this school. Like a lawyer would take what you been saying and make hash out of you in five minutes. After that you wouldn't have a friend in town."

"Don't try to bull your way out of it, Denny. You can't live with a thing like this."

"Who says I can't?"

"It'll wear you down. It'll split you in two."

"Don't give me that psychological jazz. Look, what's done is done. The old guy is dead. You can't bring him back." All at once he shrugged his evasions away. "Anyway, he stepped off the curb against the light. Should I get into a mess over an accident that was the other guy's fault?"

"Denny, I know you didn't intend to hit him. But it wasn't his fault. The light was with him. There's a witness who says you stopped on the green light and started up on the red." Denny blinked as if slapped. "You know you're color blind, don't you? And you were on pot at the time."

"You're really out to get me, aren't you, Ratfink?"

"No, I'm not. I only want you to see the thing clearly."

Denny's face took on an expression that Tim had never seen before, with lips drawn back as if he was about to scream. But when he spoke his voice was hard. "Okay, I see it clearly. What the hell is the difference? In another year they'll have me in the Army anyway."

"You can't get out of it like that. You've got a responsibility."

"To who?"

"What about the old man's daughter?"

"What about her?"

"She hasn't any money. She's a cripple."

"She can get help from the charities, can't she?"

"Come off it. She's entitled to collect from your insurance company, and you know it."

"There's a lot *you* don't know. Ever see a policy for a minor? If they could show I was high they wouldn't have to pay a cent. And they'd find that out, you can be damn sure."

"Well, your father can afford to pay."

"Yeah. Like a hundred thou? That's the kind of verdict juries give in a case like this. You haven't heard him on the subject."

"Listen, Denny, talk to the police, tell them you're sorry you ran away, it was an accident. They'd

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make it easy for you. Maybe you'd lose your license for a while, that's all. But hold back and it's a serious crime. Suppose your dad had to dig into the breadbox. This is a bigger thing than money. It's your whole future."

The older boy's eyes became congested with anger. "You turned into a preacher or something? Reverend, don't you worry about this sinner. Worry about yourself. You rat on me and you'll think you been hit by a bazooka. You think my Big Daddy will go on paying a salary to your Little Daddy? You think your daddy will find another job in this town? Or anywhere, without a reference? You think he would want you to bug me like this? Why don't you ask him?"

The questions stung with the lash of truth. Tim could almost hear his father's agitated voice. You're imagining, Tim-boy. You must have it wrong. It's nothing to do with you. You're accusing George Flagg, too. That's serious. There is a lot at stake here. You got to consider your mother. I don't think she could stand it if I got fired. And your own education. The scholarship isn't enough—you know that. So who pays if I'm out of a job? It isn't as if you had a call to accuse Denny. That's up to the police. Let them find out who did it. What's the Gaddis woman to you? Start a thing like this, no telling where it will end. Now you be a good boy, don't make trouble for me. It would kill your mother.

And his mother pleading: Oh, Tim, I'm sure it's not true. I'll pray for you to get rid of this awful suspicion. Promise me you won't breathe it to another soul.

As the silence lengthened, Denny knew that he had scored. He stood looking down at Tim, not without sympathy. "Grow up, *compadre*. Don't let them fill you up with all that bunk about civic responsibility. This is a me-first world, and you better believe it." He shrugged. "I guess that's the end of a beautiful friendship. Okay. So I resign. As of now." He turned and walked out of the office.

Tim's heart was pumping as if he were running a fast mile. You going to let Denny get away with this? Stand by while that crippled woman is cheated? You hold back knowledge of a serious crime and what does that make you? If you can't stand up for your convictions, are you fit to be the editor of anything?

Simultaneously, another part of his mind was screaming, Want to kill mom? Wreck dad? Okay, if that's what you want, be an informer, be a rat!

The clash of emotions in him was so intolerable that he pushed himself to his feet, left the school, and walked unseeingly down the street. He felt as if the world had

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split open before his eyes, and that for the first time he saw the awfulness inside.

A me-first world. Lies and compromises everywhere, from governments down to Denny. Everybody cheating, out to save his own skin. What do right and wrong mean to people like the Flaggs? Or to the Merkles if it comes to that? They'll always find a reason why right means what's good for them and wrong means what's bad for them. Ideals of democracy? Welfare of society? How many care, really care?

But I care, he thought, I've got to care, or what am I? He thrust his hands in his pockets and leaned against a tree. What am I going to do? Suddenly he saw his options with blinding clarity. Clam up and betray yourself. Speak out and ruin those you love. Or cop out, break away, head for hippieland.

It was late in the day and the sun was low in the sky. He stared at the bands of fiery red and vivid green that were building up in the west. He knew that no matter what he decided he would never again be able to see those colors without pain. A tear was running down his cheek, and he brushed it away, ashamed.

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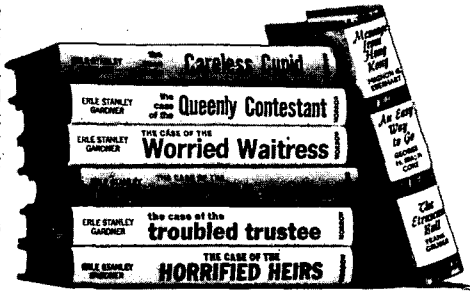
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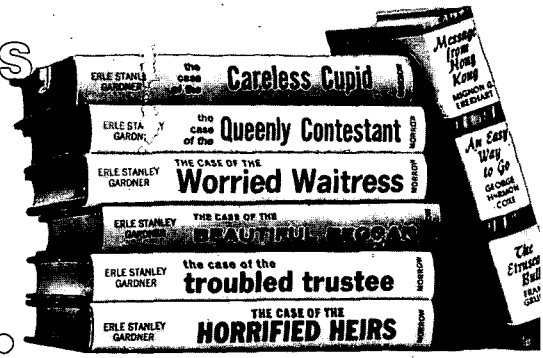
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